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SCHOPENHAUER'S

The World as Will
and Representation

A Critical Guide

Edited by
Judith Norman and
Alistair Welchman

SCHOPENHAUER'S *THE WORLD AS WILL* AND REPRESENTATION

Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* is one of the central texts in the history of European philosophy. It is one of the last monuments to the project of grand synthetic philosophical system-building, where a single, unified work could aim to clarify, resolve, and ground all the central questions of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, religion, aesthetics and science. Poorly received at its initial publication, it soon became a powerful cultural force, inspiring not only philosophers but also artists, writers and musicians, and attracting a large popular audience of non-scholars. Perhaps equally importantly, Schopenhauer was one of the first European philosophers to take non-European thought seriously and to treat it as a living tradition rather than as a mere object of study. This volume of new essays showcases the enormous variety of contemporary scholarship on this monumental text, as well as its enduring relevance.

Judith Norman is Professor of Philosophy at Trinity University, Texas. She has published articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy, and has translated works by Schelling, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Alistair Welchman is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He has published articles on Schopenhauer, Schelling and contemporary French philosophy, and has translated works by Schopenhauer and Maimon.

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Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations

The contributors to this volume use the standard abbreviations listed below. If no author is mentioned, the work is by Schopenhauer. Unless indicated otherwise, either below or by an individual contributor, all translations of Schopenhauer's works are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Schopenhauer*.

Abbreviations

- Ak. Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vols. 1–22, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften; vol. 23, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin; vols 24ff. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, 1900ff.
- FR *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, 2nd edition. In *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, On Vision and Colours, On the Will in Nature*. Translated and edited by David E. Cartwright, Edward E. Erdmann and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- FW *On the Freedom of the Will*. Translated and edited by Christopher Janaway. In *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- GB *Gesammelte Briefe*. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Bonn: Bouvier, 1978.
- HN 1–5 *Der handschriftliche Nachlaß*, 5 vols. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Frankfurt am Main: Kramer, 1970.
- OBM *On the Basis of Morals*. In *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Translated and edited by Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- MR 1–4 *Manuscript Remains*. 4 Vols. Edited by Arthur Hübscher and translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Berg, 1988.
- PP 1 *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Vol. 1. Translated and edited by Sabine Roehr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- PP 2 *Parerga and Paralipomena*. Vol. 2. Translated and edited by Adrian del Caro and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- SW 1–7 *Sämtliche Werke*. 7 Vols. Edited by Arthur Hübscher. Mannheim: F. A. Brockhaus, 1988.
- VC *On Vision and Colours*. In *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, On Vision and Colours, On the Will in Nature*. Translated and edited by David E. Cartwright, Edward E. Erdmann, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- WN *On the Will in Nature*. In *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, On Vision and Colours, On the Will in Nature*. Translated and edited by David E. Cartwright, Edward E. Erdmann, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- WWR 1 *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol. 1. Translated and edited by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- WWR 2 *The World as Will and Representation*. Vol. 2. Translated and edited by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Introduction: Schopenhauer in the Time of Pandemic

Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman

We proposed this collection in 2018, which seems in retrospect (although certainly not at the time) like a very innocent year. By the time we were collecting essays from the contributors at the beginning of 2020, the coronavirus was spreading internationally. At the end of February 2020, we held a workshop at the Central Division conference of the American Philosophical Association in Chicago, and a number of contributors met to trade drafts and ideas. Cities started closing down a couple of weeks later. We look back with pleasure and relief at our time in Chicago and the intellectual conviviality of that face-to-face event: pleasure at the lively conversation and new acquaintances, and relief that it took place at all, just before the shutdown, and that none of us became sick at the conference. Who knows what state the world will be in when this volume is published?

Nobody can know, but Schopenhauer might have had a canny guess. Indeed, there is something darkly ironic about producing a volume on *The World as Will and Representation* (WWR) – a book that treats optimism with undisguised contempt, indeed as something not just “absurd” but downright “wicked” (WWR 1, 352; SW 2, 385) – during a global pandemic. Nor would the gap of (almost exactly) 200 years between the appearance of his volume and the appearance of ours leave any scope for historical progress or even historical novelty, according to Schopenhauer. A deeply ahistorical thinker, he expected nothing to change. His own special combination of profound nihilism, Anglophilia, and love of poetry is on display as he quotes Byron:

*Our life is a false nature, – 'tis not in
The harmony of things, this hard decree,
This ineradicable taint of sin,
This boundless Upas, this all-blasting tree
Whose root is earth, whose leaves and branches be
The skies, which rain their plagues on men like dew –*

*Disease, death, bondage – all the woes we see –
And worse, the woes we see not – which throb through
The immedicable soul, which heart-aches ever new.*¹

Schopenhauer often uses the verb “plague” as a metaphor, but we might be tempted to read the term more literally and seriously at this historical moment, when a (currently) “immedicable” plague is indeed being rained upon us. Schopenhauer expected nothing less; he formulated his system to confirm that “disease, death, bondage” constitute our acknowledged and “ineradicable” (and equally “immedicable”) state of affairs, and to guide us in the question of how to think through our place in this desperate world.

One of the themes that this volume brings out is the endurance and contemporary relevance of some of Schopenhauer’s most pressing concerns. In a sense, he is right to be ahistorical: Is it not this reaching out of its time that makes a work a classic, eternal even? Principal among these concerns of course is the question of how to respond as plagues overwhelm us (which is Schopenhauer’s description of existence in a normal state, the plague *of* existence rather than a plague within existence). His famous answer involves the negation of the will, the ascetic denial and rejection of desire. Of course, this response is more striking than it is clear, and several of the essays in this volume tackle the question of what is meant, entailed, and achieved by negation of the will.

In Chapter 1, **Christopher Janaway** takes this question up directly, arguing that Schopenhauer’s theory of negation of the will is problematic: How can you will not to will? If will is the basis of all reality, who would remain to experience the satisfaction that negation of the will supposedly generates? Janaway responds to these apparent paradoxes by arguing that negation of the will is best thought of as negation specifically of the will to life, and that this is compatible with the existence of other kinds of willing. Will to life is *egoistic* willing; and the negation of this kind of willing is consistent with *nonegoistic* willing and, in particular, with moral action.

This more constrained interpretation of the doctrine of negation of the will not only makes more sense of the text (for instance, when Schopenhauer distinguishes between self- and other-directed willing), it also helps clarify Schopenhauer’s account of the relation between virtue and holiness. The morally righteous person has other-directed desires at least some of the time, but not necessarily all of the time, while the saint no longer has any self-directed desires at all. Finally, Janaway shows that this

¹ Schopenhauer gives a prose translation into German. The verse is from *Childe Harold*, IV, 126.

interpretation of negation of the will brings Schopenhauer closer to the Buddhist models he cites in support of his theory.

In Chapter 2, **Bernard Reginster** provides a different perspective on some of these themes, deepening our understanding of Schopenhauer's pessimism. This pessimism is rooted in the idea that there is something systematically delusive about desire, since fulfilling our desires does not give the lasting satisfaction we would want. But Schopenhauer holds out the possibility that we can detach from our desires through resignation. How is such detachment possible? Reginster confronts the same problem we saw in Janaway, that the act of denial of the will cannot itself be an act of will; but Reginster looks to a solution Janaway rejected, namely, Schopenhauer's appeal to a secularized version of the Christian concept of grace.

In probing the structure of resignation, Reginster argues that it must involve some "incentive" in the form of cognitive insight into "the will's inner conflict and its essential nothingness" (WWR I §68, 424; SW 2, 470), which leads one to voluntary asceticism (i.e., mortification of the will), which in turn leads to resignation. Reginster shows that Schopenhauer provides two mechanisms for this. In the first, knowledge of the necessity of suffering motivates ascetic self-deprivation, which brings indifference to it. In the second this knowledge directly and of itself brings about indifference.

Reginster ends with a puzzle – Schopenhauer describes resignation as causing not merely relief, as we would expect, but joy. It is a suggestion that, while inconsistent with the picture of resignation and abnegation most obviously on offer in the text, hints at broader possibilities for Schopenhauer's philosophy.

In Chapter 3, **Sandra Shapshay** pushes in this same direction – the seemingly anomalous presence of joy in Schopenhauer's system – now, however, in the context of his aesthetic theory, looking at the joy Schopenhauer acknowledges us to feel in the presence of natural beauty in general, and plant life, in particular. Many commentators try to minimize this question of pleasure, subordinating it to the cognitive aspect of Schopenhauer's aesthetic, the insight it gives us into the Platonic Forms or Ideas of things. Shapshay resists this interpretation. But she also resists its opposite but still reductive or unifying strategy that minimizes the cognitive for the sake of the hedonic. In fact, she discards the notion that Schopenhauer had a unified aesthetic theory as not only false but undesirable; she argues not only for the hybridity of Schopenhauer's theory, but for the explanatory strength of this rich and multidimensional aesthetics.

She shows that Schopenhauer develops two mutually irreducible spectrums of aesthetic value, based on two different criteria. The spectrum that commentators acknowledge in Schopenhauer is the hierarchy of the arts, which puts architecture and fountainry at the bottom (as revealing the lower Ideas) and literature at the top, as a display of the higher, more complex Ideas. The spectrum that is overlooked, but becomes visible if we take his more formalist views of natural aesthetics seriously, is the spectrum of the beautiful and sublime, where the beautiful – and botanical beauty in particular – lends itself more readily than experiences at the sublime pole to a state of mind that is not only tranquilizing but (in a departure from his usual attitude) positively joyful.

In Chapter 4, **Cheryl Foster** also takes up themes in Schopenhauer's theory of art and finds not just aesthetic and affective but cognitive and political value in it. Specifically, she examines not aesthetic contemplation but the active aspect of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, the theory of genius, which she situates within a politics of knowledge. Many of our dominant social institutions tend to value (and fund) science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education over arts education and promote a technocratic conception of genius. This is at the expense of the arts, which are devalued, defunded, and overlooked as potential sources of knowledge. Foster argues that Schopenhauer (despite his own strong resources of bigotry) is in a position to address this injustice by making an argument for the distinction between talent and genius, or conceptual and intuitive understanding, and giving a strong argument for the significance and specificity of aesthetic, intuitive cognition.

Foster looks carefully at Schopenhauer's description of the experience of artistic inspiration, the receptivity characteristic of genius that enables artists to create aesthetically significant works. She shows that Schopenhauer finds unexpected confirmation in the account Edith Wharton gave of her own artistic process, unexpected, not least because Schopenhauer thought that women could not be geniuses. To realize the potential of Schopenhauer's analysis, we need to free him from some of his reactionary investments, such as his anti-Semitism, misogyny, elitism, and mystifications. Foster carefully reconstructs a theory of genius and intuitive cognition that is both free from these elements and consistent with the phenomenology of artistic experience as reported by practicing artists. The result is a unique account of a vital source of nonconceptual knowledge.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, **Matthias Kofler** shows how Schopenhauer's philosophy has the potential to enhance our epistemic resources; specifically, he argues that Schopenhauer's theory of character is relevant to the

recent revival of the concept of character in the social sciences. Koßler argues that the theory of character Schopenhauer presented in his later essays is at best radically simplified, and at worst inconsistent with the theory developed in *The World as Will and Representation*. In the late prize essays (published in 1841), for instance, Schopenhauer develops the Kantian distinction between intelligible and empirical character, treating the former as an innate, unchangeable metaphysical entity, while in the earlier WWR (published 1819), Schopenhauer emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence, even for his metaphysics, so that intelligible character must be thought of in relation to experience.

Furthermore, reason itself is an essential component of being human, and rationality involves the possibility of partly resisting the effect of a motive on the will, hindering it from achieving expression in action. Thus, human species character cannot just be a set of fixed properties (as in the early account), but rather a general field of possibilities which our rationality uses to individualize us. Koßler uses this supple account of WWR to present a more compelling account of character than the empirical determinism of the prize essays allows. In conclusion, Koßler goes so far as to recommend avoiding the Kantian terminology of intelligible versus empirical character that achieves prominence in the prize essays. Instead, we should talk of a general concept of personhood that is necessarily specialized into an individual character.

While Koßler looks at the originality of Schopenhauer's approach vis-à-vis Kant, in Chapter 6, **Manja Kisner** stresses the continuity between Schopenhauer and his contemporaries, in particular, Fichte and Schelling. Kisner focuses on a concept that first appeared in Fichte – the intelligible subject as a nexus of ethical drives that tend toward an ethical world order. There is so much about this conception that Schopenhauer rejected (mocking the notion of an ethical world order) that we often miss the positive influences. Kisner points, for instance, to the fact that Fichte was discussing agency in terms of drives and responding to the problem (from Kant) of illicitly positing a causal relationship between the intelligible and empirical registers. Fichte resolved that latter problem with something like a double-aspect theory similar to the one that Schopenhauer also adopted in claiming that the world is both will *and* representation.

Schopenhauer, however, disagrees with Fichte's idea that the intelligible world is a sort of moral destination, his moral fatalism. Kisner sees WWR as a reply to Fichte on this account. Schelling furthers the development toward Schopenhauer by abandoning moral fatalism, and seeing the possibility of moral action as well as immoral action as contingent (not

fatalistic) and rooted in an irrational, amoral ground. Here we are on recognizably Schopenhauerian territory, although Schelling thinks that this ground provides a path to the possibility of a moral world order, albeit not a fated one.

Schopenhauer's relation to this tradition is not the more or less blank rejection he says it is but can be seen as continuing and radicalizing it. He accepted Schelling's notion of an amoral ground of being but viewed it as an occasion for a negative rather than a positive morality. Freedom comes not from grounding oneself in the will and acting rationally but from resisting the will altogether. This characteristically Schopenhauerian theoretical move, however, presupposes the philosophical tools developed by his contemporaries.

In Chapter 7, **Dennis Vanden Auweele** also looks at Schopenhauer's relation to his contemporaries, but this time in terms of the philosophy of religion. Schopenhauer, Vanden Auweele argues, is very much a product of his (romantic) age, and in dialogue with contemporary scholars of Asia such as Creuzer who were actively researching Asian religions and developing philosophies of myth. According to Vanden Auweele, Creuzer had a great, though unacknowledged, influence on Schopenhauer's thought, in particular, with his view that global systems of myth are related and originated in South Asia. Schopenhauer parts ways with Creuzer, however, in developing a theory that systems of myth are rooted in intuitive rather than conceptual understanding. Myth is not a clear and abstract system of meaning, but rather an allegorical expression of basic metaphysical truths that the originators of mythology grasp intuitively.

For Schopenhauer, systems of myth (and by extension religions) agree to the extent they share a grounding (pessimistic) intuition. Vanden Auweele finds resources in WWR for Schopenhauer to develop a theory of myth-making that accounts not only for myths that accurately depict reality (pessimistic systems of myth, for Schopenhauer) but also for myths and religions that get it wrong and stray into optimism. The result is a sophisticated philosophy of religion and a useful and original intervention into the contemporary debate over the origin of myths, an aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy that is too often overlooked or undervalued.

In Chapter 8, **Stephan Atzert** turns our attention from Schopenhauer's *theory* of religion to his *use* of religion, and specifically to the Asian traditions from which he drew two of his central ideas – *Nieban* (Nirvana) and *Maja* (Maya). Although Schopenhauer connected these ideas systematically in his philosophy, the concepts themselves emerge from quite distinct traditions: Maya is central to the Vendanta schools in

India while Nirvana is Buddhist. According to the former, Maya is the manifestation but also the veil of the absolute, God-consciousness; but according to the latter, there is no essence of things, or the essence of things is nothing. The two traditions use the concepts almost independently while Schopenhauer blends them into a whole.

Schopenhauer's source for his concept of *Maja* is the *Oupnek'hat*, an influential Latin translation of a Persian translation of a selection of the *Upanishads*, which presents a quite specific interpretation of Maya as not only a passive source of delusion, but an active life force. As a result, Maya becomes connected not just with representation, but also with the world as will. Schopenhauer appears to make use of this interpretation in his doctrine of denial of the will, where we have to pierce through not just the world as representation (the obvious understanding of Maya) but also the will itself.

Schopenhauer's access to the Buddhist conception of *Nieban* was also circuitous, and he does not use the term (Nirvana) with anything like the frequency that he uses Maya; even when he does use it, he sometimes treats it as an unhelpful euphemism for "nothingness." Atzert argues that this philosophical ontologization of *Nieban* is misleading. Schopenhauer's sources, in fact, reject the identification of *Nieban* with nothingness as well as its identification with divinity (Brahmen). What is most basic both to his sources and to Schopenhauer's own account is Nirvana as release from suffering.

In Chapter 9, **Robert Wicks** takes up the theme of Schopenhauer's engagement with Eastern thought and suffering and uses it to shed additional light on one of the themes Janaway and Reginster introduced earlier in the volume: the question of whether the thing-in-itself can be accurately described as "will." Schopenhauer admits that, although our inner experience of our body as will leads us to generalize the will as the in-itself of other phenomena, this is not yet an accurate depiction of the thing-in-itself, as it is still subject to the form of time. Yet he persistently describes the in-itself of reality as "will," and it is hard to see how anything other than an endlessly striving will could underwrite his well-known pessimism.

By looking at the distinctive way Schopenhauer draws on various religious traditions of mysticism, Wicks argues that Schopenhauer's use of Christianity appears in his vocabulary of universal guilt, which is key to understanding the manner in which suffering is universal. However, a Christian interpretation of the mystical experience would tend to push Schopenhauer in the direction of saying that there is more to the thing-in-itself than will, since the mystical experience is experience of something,

and if will is negated something must remain to be experienced. Wicks, however, argues that Schopenhauer's pessimism is incompatible with any interpretation of the thing-in-itself that denies it to be will; and this puts him in touch with a more Buddhist form of mysticism, and explains the enthusiasm with which he accepted Buddhism when he finally encountered it.

In Chapter 10, **Alistair Welchman** turns to Schopenhauer's epistemology, arguing that Schopenhauer was a direct perceptual realist and then drawing out the possible interpretative consequences of this in two areas: the theory of compassion and Schopenhauer's theory of meaning. In a direct theory of perception, perception is not mediated by a representation, but directly involves the object of perception itself; and this can be seen in Schopenhauer's epistemology, not because he eschews representation but because he identifies the object *with* representation.

Schopenhauer's direct perceptual realism sheds light on two difficulties elsewhere in his thought. The first difficulty is in his theory of compassion. Schopenhauer's official view is that in compassion we see through the veil of *maya* into our essential identity with all other beings as will. Many commentators find this extravagant and suggest a psychological account instead, in which we imagine ourselves in the situation of the other. However, this is contradicted by Schopenhauer's own account of a similar contemporary theory, in which he appears to suggest that we directly perceive the other's emotions. Schopenhauer's independent commitment to direct realism makes this alternative more attractive than the standard psychological account.

The second area is the shift in Schopenhauer's metaphysics from a transcendent claim about the constitution of the in-itself of appearances to an "immanent" hermeneutical claim about the *meaning* of the world. This shift is less significant than often thought because Schopenhauer has a direct realist picture of our access to semantic meaning, in general. Applying this model to Schopenhauer's metaphysics commits the hermeneutical model to an appearance-transcendent meaning to which we have direct access, something that is not far distant from the original transcendent metaphysics.

Like Welchman, but using very different means, **Marco Segala** argues, in Chapter 11, that the tight seal Schopenhauer wanted to maintain between ordinary experience along with its investigation in the natural sciences on the one hand, and metaphysics on the other, is more porous than Schopenhauer can acknowledge in WWR 1. However, Segala goes on to argue, Schopenhauer's continuing engagement with this issue prompted a revision to his metaphysics by the time of WWR 2.

Segala begins by noting that, in Book 2 of WWR 1, Schopenhauer argues that the will as thing-in-itself is ultimately prior to representation. Will must therefore “split” itself, and this “splitting” of the will (which Schopenhauer mentions has its phenomenal correlate in polarity) positions the text in something like the tradition of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, giving an ultimate philosophical account of scientifically irreducible fundamental forces. Ontologically, the first move in splitting is that the will posits the Platonic Forms or Ideas, a graded hierarchy of mutually irreducible natural forms starting with fundamental forces and culminating in humanity. But a scientific perspective reveals several problems here; for instance, that of accounting for this splitting in the first place, and especially the paradoxical role of the Ideas, nonspatiotemporal denizens of a Platonic realm that are nevertheless supposed to ground scientific explanations. Segala shows how grappling with these issues caused Schopenhauer to rethink parts of his metaphysical project in WWR 2.

Segala first proposes a rethinking of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of nature, conceiving it less as an “explanation” of science and more as a conceptual space in which metaphysics (Ideas) and science (natural forces) can interact. But ultimately, he argues, Schopenhauer abandoned the Ideas completely as having any role in scientific explanation, supplementing his philosophy of nature with a philosophy of natural science that anticipates modern approaches.

Rounding up the collection in a very different vein, **Judith Norman** takes up the complicated question of feminism in WWR in Chapter 12. Political critiques of the history of philosophy frequently accuse philosophers of illegitimately universalizing a particular view of subjectivity – unwittingly normalizing a parochial conception of human nature, for instance. Although this critique can undoubtedly be extended to Schopenhauer, it is striking that Nietzsche, drawing largely on metaphysical resources derived from Schopenhauer, was one of the first to really recognize and contest this illegitimate philosophical strategy. Norman looks at the extent to which Schopenhauer anticipated Nietzsche in this project of tracing a genealogy of the subject within a metaphysics of will, closely examining Schopenhauer’s fraught discussion of sexual difference in the “Metaphysics of Sexual Love.” This leads her to the question of the ontological status of sexual difference, and whether this cleft in nature registers at the level of transcendental subjectivity, and the consequences for Schopenhauer’s view of the subject, the question of women readers of the text, and women subjects of philosophy, in general.

Altogether, these essays showcase not simply the vast diversity and sophistication of Schopenhauer studies, but the extraordinary versatility and philosophical longevity of the *WWR*. It is one of the last great texts in the European tradition that has implications for contemporary understandings of issues and disciplines from feminist politics to philosophy of art, from epistemology to mysticism, from ethics to philosophy of science. These essays are a testament to its enduring scholarly interest and relevance.

CHAPTER I

Different Kinds of Willing in Schopenhauer

Christopher Janaway

I Introduction

Schopenhauer's theory of the negation of the will has troubled interpreters ever since it was published.¹ There are many seemingly unanswerable questions. How can the will deny itself? How can a will whose essence is to will life turn and will in the opposite direction, against life? If it is willing in any direction, how can willing have ceased? This chapter is an attempt at a kind of reconstruction, which suggests how Schopenhauer could fulfill some of his aims while removing some of these difficulties. Schopenhauer asserts that the state of highest value, in which redemption from life is found, is one of "true will-lessness [*wahre Willenslosigkeit*]" or "the complete self-abolition and negation of the will [*die gänzliche Selbstaufhebung und Verneinung des Willens*]" (WWR I, 389, my emphases). But I shall argue that we should be skeptical of this assertion, and that a better theory results if we regard Schopenhauerian redemption as the abolition of just one kind of willing, namely, willing directed toward the happiness of the individual "I." I shall present three advantages of such a reconstruction. First, it takes account of passages in which Schopenhauer implicitly recognizes other kinds of willing that are not directed toward the happiness of the individual "I." Second, it makes it easier to see how redemption and moral goodness can be closely related. Third, it arguably places Schopenhauer's notion somewhat closer to the Indian models, in particular, to Buddhism, that he claims coincide with his own notion of redemption.

2 Redemption Described

In Volume 2 of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer writes in the following terms:

¹ See, for example, Schopenhauer's exchange with Frauenstädt in 1852 (GB, 288, 568–69).

Christianity is the doctrine of the profound guilt of the human race through its very existence, and the heart's longing for a redemption that can only be achieved by the most difficult sacrifice and denial of one's own self, and so by a complete overturning of human nature. . . . So the great fundamental truth of Christianity as well as Brahmanism and Buddhism, namely the need for redemption from an existence given over to suffering and death, and our ability to attain this redemption by means of the negation of the will, that is, by assuming a decisive stand in opposition to nature, this is incomparably the most important truth that there can be. (WWR 2, 641–4)²

Schopenhauer's conflation of the Indian schools of thought with Christianity is something we must now find questionable; and we should be equally suspicious of his uncritical equation of the different Indian traditions, Buddhism and (as he calls it) Brahmanism. But for the moment let us leave such criticisms out of consideration, and concentrate on the basic structure of his soteriology. Let us also leave out of the picture what seems to be the specifically Christian concept of "guilt."³ A full appraisal of Schopenhauer's soteriology cannot ignore its professed, and genuine, continuity with Christianity.⁴ However, for present purposes I intend to examine the general

² "Das Christenthum ist die Lehre von der tiefsten Verschuldung des Menschengeschlechts durch sein Daseyn selbst und dem Drange des Herzens nach Erlösung daraus, welche jedoch nur durch die schwersten Opfer und durch die Verleugnung des eigenen Selbst, also durch eine gänzliche Umkehrung der menschlichen Natur erlangt werden kann. . . . Jene große, im Christenthum, wie im Brahmanismus und Buddhismus enthaltene Wahrheit also, nämlich das Bedürfniß der Erlösung aus einem Daseyn, welches dem Leiden und dem Tode anheimgefallen ist, und die Erreichbarkeit derselben durch Verneinung des Willens, also durch ein entschiedenes der Natur Entgegentreten, ist ohne Vergleich die wichtigste, die es geben kann" (SW 3, 719–23).

³ Already in the 1880s, readers of Schopenhauer questioned his allegation that guilt attaches to human existence and regarded it as an extraneous remnant of Christianity within a fundamentally atheist system. The historian of pessimism Olga Plümacher observed that Schopenhauer's philosophy was a case of "remaining stuck [*Steckenbleiben*] in the scholastic concepts of freedom, guilt and sin" (Olga Plümacher, *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart: Geschichtliches und Kritisches*, 2nd edition, Heidelberg: Georg Weiss, 1888, 248). Three years later, Nietzsche, having read the 1884 edition of Plümacher's book, writes of Schopenhauer's "*Steckenbleiben* in Christian-ascetic moral perspectives." He also praised Buddhism as "truer and more objective" than Christianity precisely because it does not link suffering with sin. See *The Anti-Christ*, sect. 23, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19.

⁴ Paul Deussen, for example, saw Christianity not as an extraneous influence on Schopenhauer, but as close to the heart of the matter: For him, Schopenhauer was the *philosophus christianissimus* – the most Christian philosopher (Paul Deussen, "Schopenhauer und die Religion," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 4, 1915, 8–15). Hans Vaihinger also wrote: "no recent philosopher has penetrated so deeply into the essence of Christianity, and so warmly defended its core, as Schopenhauer" (Hans Vaihinger, *Nietzsche als Philosoph*, Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1902). On German theorizing about Schopenhauer as a Christian thinker, see Matthias Kößler, *Empirische Ethik und christliche Moral* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1999), 11–20. On Schopenhauer and Christianity, see Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Christian Perspectives," in Sandra Shapshay, ed., *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 351–72.

shape of Schopenhauer's conception of redemption, abstracting from its more specifically Christian elements such as guilt, and indeed sin.

The overall structure of Schopenhauer's soteriology is as follows:

- (1) There is an unsatisfactory condition which coincides with our very existence.
- (2) There is an attainable redemption from the unsatisfactory condition.

"Redemption" translates *Erlösung*, which in English might also be "release," "liberation," or "deliverance," in which case Schopenhauer's invocation of the Indian schools of thought may after all have some broad motivation. *Erlösung* looks at least parallel to the notion of *mokṣa*, "liberation," in the various traditions that Schopenhauer would label as Brahmanism, and perhaps to the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, although that means extinguishment rather than liberation. Schopenhauer himself draws explicit attention to both these parallels (see WWR 2, 623; PP2, 281). In addition, as many have commented,⁵ (1) and (2) above have some similarity with the Buddha's First and Third Noble Truths, the truth of suffering and the truth of the end of suffering.⁶ I shall return to Buddhism later (section 7).

My first question is: How are we to understand Schopenhauer's descriptions of this redemption? Even in the above short extract, the redeeming or liberating state is characterized in different ways. Thus redemption is to be attained:

- (a) by the most difficult sacrifice and denial of one's own self,
- (b) by a complete overturning of human nature,
- (c) by assuming a decisive stand in opposition to nature,
- (d) by the negation of the will.

It appears that Schopenhauer intends (a)–(d) as alternative characterizations of one and the same means to attaining redemption. But we may surely wonder whether "nature," "human nature," "one's own self," and "will" are synonyms. One reason why this question is hard to answer is that

⁵ For example, Dorothea Dauer, *Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1969); Moira Nicholls, "The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself," in Christopher Janaway, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 188–96; David E. Cooper, "Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy," in Bart Vandenabeele, ed., *A Companion to Schopenhauer* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 269–71; Christopher Ryan, "Schopenhauer and Gotama on Life's Suffering," in Shapshay, ed., *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, 351–72.

⁶ Schopenhauer refers approvingly to the Four Noble Truths as the source of redemption (WWR 2, 638). Here I shall leave undisturbed the notion of "suffering" for *dukkha*, while acknowledging that this is a much-disputed translation. For discussion see, for example, Ryan "Schopenhauer and Gotama," 386; Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6–9.

Schopenhauer uses the notion of *will* in a multifarious and often confusing way. I want to suggest that Schopenhauer's formulation (d), redemption as "negation of the will," is the *least* satisfactory, because *will* is an elusive and unfocused concept, made unsatisfactory by the fact that Schopenhauer puts it to an excessive number of uses. This is a heretical statement because, of course, *will* (*Wille*) is the most important and innovative concept in Schopenhauer's philosophy. Nonetheless, my aim is to focus more tightly on just what it is that requires negation in Schopenhauer's version of redemption. My answer takes the form of a reconstruction, but it is a reconstruction that I try to support with Schopenhauerian materials.

3 Kinds of Willing

For the sake of clarity, let us consider two succinct claims:

- (3) Redemption is through negation of the will to life.
- (4) All instances of will are instances of will to life.

Schopenhauer's adherence to (4) is made clear when he says, "it is a mere pleonasm and amounts to the same thing if, instead of simply saying 'the will', we say 'the will to life'" (WWR 1, 301). It would follow from (3) and (4) together that in redemption *all willing* should be negated. Schopenhauer frequently states as much: Thus he can paraphrase redemption as "complete abandonment of the will to life, i.e. all willing" (WWR 1, 401). In other well-known passages he envisages an existence of total passivity, that of a purely cognitive being, an "untarnished mirror of the world" who "gazes back calmly at the phantasm of this world that . . . now stands before him as indifferently as chess pieces after the game is over" (WWR 1, 417). However, I shall argue that in fact Schopenhauer is less secure in his commitment to (4) than might at first appear from such definite utterances. I shall argue that he recognizes kinds of willing that are distinct from will to life. If this is the case, negation of *the will to life* need not be negation of *all* willing. A human being might thus in principle retain desires and act upon them, whilst reaching the state of redemption.

Schopenhauer characterizes will to life as giving rise to egoistic action: "egoism grows on the basis of the will to life" (OBM, 191). Will to life is the natural essence of human individuals, and of all living beings.⁷ It

⁷ In fact, Schopenhauer characterizes will to life both as the essence of each individual, and as an overarching species-essence. In its latter role it is aimed at producing and sustaining *life*, but often at the expense of the individual. So, in the famous "Metaphysics of Sexual Love" lovers are unknowingly manipulated by the species-will so that they reproduce superior offspring (see WWR 2, 551–54).

disposes individuals to will their own continued being and happiness. As a consequence, their natural state is desiring and striving for the interests of the particular living human being:

This *egoism*, both in an animal and in a human being, is linked in the most precise way with his innermost core and essence, and indeed is properly identical with it. So all his actions, as a rule, spring from egoism and the explanation of any given action is always to be sought in it first of all *Egoism* is, by its nature, boundless; the human being unconditionally wills to preserve his existence, wills it unconditionally free from pains, including also from all lack and privation, wills every pleasure of which he is capable, and even seeks where possible to develop new capacities for pleasure. He wills where possible to take pleasure in everything, to have everything; but, since this is impossible, at least to master everything: “All for me and nothing for the others” is his favorite saying. . . . In line with this, each one makes himself the mid-point of the world, relates everything to himself (OBM, 190).

If our proposition (4) is true, then we can see how the view arises that unless *all* will is extirpated, all that can ever happen is self-centered egoistic action, doomed to pursue the illusory end of the individual’s happiness and pleasure. But if (4) is rejected, then the will to life may be extinguished in the individual – which is serious enough – but that extinguishment would leave the way open for will, desire, and action that is not egoistic.

4 The Alternative Descriptions

As we saw in section 2, in the formulations we labelled (a)–(c), Schopenhauer also indicates the target or object of negation, as “self,” “nature,” and “human nature.” This variation of terminology may bear some investigation. How we understand denial of *one’s own self* depends on what we take the self to be, and Schopenhauer has, to say the least, a complex conception of the self. He asks us to think of the self in at least three ways. There is the self as the *individual being*, the person, understood as a living psychophysical individual of the human species, that can refer to itself with “I.” But, second, the self is the real, nonindividuated thing in itself, what I am in myself. “Your essence in itself,”

However, there is a subtle interplay between species-will and egoism here. The species attains its reproductive goal by exploiting the predominance of egoism: “Egoism is such a deeply rooted trait of all individuality in general that egoistic goals are the only ones that can be relied upon to arouse an individual being into action. . . . [N]ature can only achieve its aim by implanting a certain *delusion* in the individual that makes what in truth is only good for the species appear to be good for the individual, so that the individual serves the species when he thinks he is serving himself” (WWR 2, 554).

Schopenhauer states, “knows neither time, nor beginning, nor end, nor the bounds of a given individuality” (PP2, 252). Thus, we are commonly mistaken, in Schopenhauer’s view, in thinking that we are simply individuals:

[T]he word “I” contains a huge equivocation . . . Thus everyone knows himself only as this individual, just as it presents itself in outer intuition. If on the other hand he could become conscious of what he is, otherwise and besides this, he would willingly leave his individuality behind, smile at the tenacity of his attachment to it. (WWR 2, 507)

Here, the individual “otherwise” is the nonindividuated thing in itself, which Schopenhauer also calls “the will.”

Third, there is the self as *subject*. The subject is that which, in being aware of any object, is aware of itself as that which is aware. But in saying that the self is the subject, we must proceed carefully. *Subject* is not an ontological category: It does not pick out a kind of thing of which I am a particular instance. It is rather a phenomenological notion: We all “find ourselves as this subject” (WWR 1, 25) simply in the very process of experiencing anything. Schopenhauer links all three conceptions of self in this passage:

This cognitive and conscious I is to the will (which is the basis of its appearance) what the image in the focus of a concave mirror is to the mirror itself, and as in the example, has only a conditional, indeed, strictly speaking, a merely apparent reality. Far from being simply first . . . it is basically third, since it presupposes the organism which in turn presupposes the will. (WWR 2, 291)

Now we can ask: In Schopenhauerian redemption, what is the “own self” that is to be sacrificed or denied? It cannot be the thing in itself, what Schopenhauer calls “your essence in itself [that] knows neither time, nor beginning, nor end.” *Ex hypothesi*, this essence in itself must never cease to exist: it is stated to have no end, and in principle nothing could destroy it, given that it stands outside appearance, outside the principle of sufficient reason, and hence outside the casual order. But, second, neither is the self as cognitive subject sacrificed or denied. Remember Schopenhauer’s vision of someone who “gazes back calmly at the phantasm of this world” (WWR 1, 417). There must be a subject *of* such indifference. It is not the passivity of a rock or a tree: It requires the capacity for a gaze upon the world, and an attitude toward the content of that gaze. Schopenhauer thinks of the redemptive state as one of blissfulness and peace. These are states of the subject that is aware of itself. So what is “sacrificed” in redemption is not this sense of being the subject.

That leaves the “organism” or spatiotemporal human individual. But in what sense can it be sacrificed or denied? It cannot be that the human individual ceases to exist upon negation of the will. Given the requirement that redemption should involve consciousness, and Schopenhauer’s sensible claim that consciousness presupposes the human organism, I, as living human individual, must also still *exist* on the other side of redemption, albeit in some altered, will-less state. A potential objection arises here: that the human individual cannot become will-less because it is by nature the manifestation of will. Schopenhauer has to concede that in the redemptive state the will is “extinguished entirely except for the last glowing spark that sustains the body and is extinguished along with it” (WWR 1, 417). But the alleged difficulty is easily resolved: “Will” is once again not univocal here. Schopenhauer warns us in a well-known passage not to think that everything that manifests will is thereby an instance of a subject’s consciously desiring something, or of there being a deliberate act of will: “anyone incapable of broadening the concept in the way we require will remain in a state of perpetual misunderstanding, using the word *will* to mean just the one species that has borne the name so far, the will that is accompanied by cognition and is expressed exclusively in accordance with motives” (WWR 1, 136). My heart’s beating manifests will in Schopenhauer’s broad sense. But I am not *the subject of* my heart’s beating. I may want it to occur, but its occurrence is not, under normal circumstances, something I do, and it is not related to my desires in whatever way my actions typically are. Schopenhauer would say that it is not *motivated* willing, not willing whose causal ancestry passes through cognition. Someone’s ceasing to be the subject of this latter kind of willing is clearly compatible with their bodily existence not only continuing, but continuing to be a manifestation of will in Schopenhauer’s broader sense.

So far it looks as though “sacrifice of one’s own self” strangely involves no aspect of the self ceasing to exist – neither my essence in itself, nor myself as human individual, nor myself as subject. This harmonizes with Schopenhauer’s statement in *Parerga and Paralipomena* that in negation of the will nothing goes out of existence: “the negation of the will to life in no way signifies the annihilation of a substance, but the mere act [*Aktus*] of not-willing; the same thing that willed hitherto wills no more” (PP2: 281). There is, however, another candidate for annihilation, namely, what Schopenhauer calls the individual’s *character*. He says quite plainly, “we are not talking about an alteration but rather a complete abolition of the character” (WWR 1, 431). What is this character that is destroyed? The notion of character is especially complicated in Schopenhauer. He makes distinctions between a natural character and an acquired character (see

WWR I, 329–34), and between empirical and intelligible characters. It is not always clear which of the latter pair in particular he is referring to. But here he must at least mean a character that is peculiar to one human being rather than another, because he adds “however different the characters concerned might have been before this abolition, their actions look very similar afterwards” (WWR I, 431). So the implication is that, once liberated, I would remain an individual human being whose body manifests will, I would still find myself as the subject of awareness, and my fundamental “essence in itself” would (necessarily) be unchanged, but the character that was peculiar to me would have gone.

Now for Schopenhauer the character is “a particular constitution of the will,” or “the individually determined will” of a human being, that fixes “the very ends he unchangeably strives after” (WWR 2, 257, 545; FW, 75). Here, “will” has to be taken in a dispositional sense. When I experience some object in my environment, acts of will occur, but what acts they are is dependent on my underlying individual disposition. Character traits of an individual are “the main tendencies of the will,” (WWR 2, 247) the lasting dispositions to act that manifest themselves in different actions, and persist, ready to be triggered, even when there is no action. According to Schopenhauer, each individual, as an appearance in the empirical world, manifests will to life. So each individual has dispositions that aim at the preservation, well-being, and satisfaction of the individual living being that they are. Thus my character is not simply mine alone, but it comprises dispositions that target my happiness alone. Losing these dispositions is compatible with Schopenhauer’s insistence that no “substance” is annihilated. As we saw, it is “the same thing” that once willed and now wills no more. It is the dispositions, not the “thing,” that cease to exist. The “thing” loses the dispositions to act that it previously had. So here is a hypothesis concerning the “sacrifice” or “denial” of one’s own self. It is one’s character that is abolished, in the sense that one ceases to be disposed toward actions that promote the happiness of the individuated self. Likewise, since for Schopenhauer, our human nature consists in our dispositions to will these self-centered actions, it makes sense to describe the situation as our nature being “overturned” or “opposed.” But if we have rejected the equation of all willing with will to life, some willing can persist once these self-centered dispositions have ceased.

5 Willing Will-lessness

Let us return once again to our initial passage. There is the unsatisfactory condition we find ourselves in, and there is the attainable redemption from it.

But a fascinating third factor is also at play, namely, the heart's longing for redemption – *der Drang des Herzens nach Erlösung*. I would argue that this *Drang* is a state of willing, rather than a mere cognitive state. Elsewhere, when Schopenhauer uses the conventional polarization of head and heart, the heart always stands for the will (WWR 2, 239–45). Also, he often refers to the will itself as a *Drang* (see, e.g., WWR 1, 174, 301; WWR 2, 224, 365). We might wish to say that this *Drang* (when described, for example, as a *blinder Drang*, WWR 1, 174) is a kind of urge, drive, or compulsion, rather than a consciously entertained *desire* for redemption. However, Schopenhauer elsewhere uses terminology that invokes a decidedly conscious, emotionally charged desire for the redemptive state, calling it a state for which “we cannot help feeling the greatest longing [*die größte Sehnsucht*], since we acknowledge that this alone is . . . infinitely superior to everything else” (WWR 1, 417). *Sehnen*, longing, is explicitly a species of willing for Schopenhauer. It occurs, for example, in a list of states of willing that he provides in his essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (FW, 38). Thus longing for a state of salvation must surely be classed as a species of *desire*, whether or not under conscious control, and whether or not associated with any overt action. So this longing looks to be a kind of willing.

In another well-known passage, Schopenhauer describes a situation in which people have attained redemption and are faced with having to maintain themselves in such a state. He says that in that situation they have to *struggle against* the will:

The peace and blissfulness we have described in the lives of saintly people is only a flower that emerges from the constant overcoming of the will, and we see the constant struggle with the will to life as the soil from which it arises; . . . Thus we also see people who have succeeded at some point in negating the will bend all their might to hold to this path by wresting renunciations of every sort from themselves, by adopting a difficult, penitent way of life and seeking out everything they find unpleasant: anything in order to subdue the will that will always strive anew. . . . I have often used the expression asceticism, and I understand by it, in the narrow sense, this deliberate [*vorsätzliche*] breaking of the will. (WWR 1, 418–19)

This case is described as involving a particularly arduous kind of *trying*: struggling, bending all one's might, deliberately breaking, wresting something from oneself, all of which Schopenhauer must regard as cases of willing. In fact, there are two senses in which will is still present here: first, the natural will that “always strives anew,” which I take to be equivalent to the will to life, here conceived as rekindling itself after previously dying away; but second, the desire, effort, and action that are deployed to resist

the natural will. Thus a will to be will-less is present: desire, effort, and action aimed at breaking the will to life.

So Schopenhauer mentions both a *longing for salvation*, which predates the redemptive state of so-called will-lessness, and a *trying to suppress the will*, which occurs once the redemptive state has been reached. Despite this, he shows some reluctance to call these phenomena cases of willing, and one can in a sense understand why. Both would seem to be cases of willing to be will-less. There is nothing directly contradictory in positing a will to be will-less, or a desire to lack desires.⁸ However, we can understand why Schopenhauer would be unhappy with openly stating his position in this manner. As we saw in section 3, once the redemptive negation of will has occurred, he imagines existing as a purely cognitive being, the calmly contemplating “untarnished mirror of the world” (WWR 1, 417). So, there is something uncomfortable in the idea that becoming such a purely cognitive being would have value for us because of its appeal to us as willing beings, or because our heart yearns for it.⁹ More uncomfortably still, if we have to keep willing strenuously in order remain in the calm, indifferent state, the state we have reached is not a purely cognitive one after all; we have not reached *true* will-lessness or *complete* self-abolition and negation of the will. My reconstructive suggestion is that Schopenhauer would be better dropping the vision of the totally will-less mirror of the world, and clarifying that it is simply a kind of willing that it is desirable to lose, the kind that aims at individual happiness and well-being.

6 Willing Differently

There is other evidence in Schopenhauer’s writings of kinds of willing distinct from the natural, self-centered willing that falls under the heading

⁸ Paul Williams urges a similar point about Buddhism: “[S]ince the Buddhist path is . . . designed to bring craving to an end, to want enlightenment is to want the practices that will eliminate among other things craving after enlightenment itself. There is no contradiction in any of this.” See Paul Williams, with Anthony Tribe and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2012), 32.

⁹ Elsewhere, Schopenhauer hesitates to say that complete will-lessness is the highest good, and restricts it to being the highest good only *figuratively* (WWR 1, 389). I have argued (Christopher Janaway, “What’s So Good about Negation of the Will? Schopenhauer and the Problem of the *Summum Bonum*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54, 4, 2016, 649–69) that the reason for this restriction is as follows: if will-lessness were literally the highest good, and a fortiori something good, then by Schopenhauer’s own lights it would have to be something that was willed, because according to him “good” can be defined as that which answers to or satisfies a will (see WWR 1, 389). In other words, if will-lessness is good, it is good because it is willed. But Schopenhauer retreats from saying either that it is literally good, or that we will it.

of will to life. In his essay *On the Basis of Morals*, Schopenhauer openly posits different species of willing. The three incentives or *Triebfeder* that lead to action are “a) Egoism; that wills one’s own well-being . . . b) Malice; that wills someone else’s woe . . . c) Compassion; which wills someone else’s well-being” (OBM, 201). Compassion is the sole incentive that can lead to morally good action. So, there must be nonegoistic willing for morality to be possible. The view that all willing is will to life makes it hard to comprehend the existence of compassion, as Schopenhauer himself acknowledges. He says that the process of *compassion* is “mysterious as regards its origin” (OBM, 216), and just has to be accepted as a fact incapable of explanation. At least part of the mystery arises from the view that willing as such is will to life, and is essentially directed at the well-being of the individual living being; if that is so, then any other kind of willing seems like a pure miracle. But if there is no prior supposition that willing is restricted in this way (i.e. if our proposition [4] in section 3 is rejected), then willing the well-being of another for its own sake may not be strange in the same way: it is just one of the ways in which our willing can turn.

In Volume 2 of *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer entertains an open-ended thought: “one could even raise the question: ‘What would I be if I were not the will to life?’” (WWR 2, 658). He regards the question as unanswerable, because our knowledge cannot reach beyond the realm of the principle of sufficient reason, in which we appear as individual embodiments of will to life. Despite the fact that he usually describes will to life as our “innermost core,” “being,” or “essence,” and as “the genuine self” (WWR 2, 621), he is also open to the idea that this is *not* the totality of what we are. Similarly, when describing the effect of witnessing tragic drama, Schopenhauer writes:

In tragedy . . . we see before our eyes the state of the world diametrically opposed to our will. At the sight of this we feel called upon to turn our will away from life, to stop wanting and loving it. Precisely this, however, makes us aware that something else remains in us that cannot be recognized positively but only negatively as that which does *not* will life [*was nicht das Leben will*]. (WWR 2, 450)

This “something in us” would again be literally ungraspable by our ordinary cognitive capacities. So we cannot really say whether it is characterized by absence of willing (not willing life, or anything at all), or whether it wills, but just turns its willing away from life. The same ambiguity attaches to his notion of *Nolle* (Latin for not-willing, *Nichtwollen*) as the opposite of *Velle* (willing) in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (PP 2, 281). The not-will is not

indifferent: it is constantly in a struggle (*Kampf*) against the will. So is it a different kind of will? Schopenhauer cannot say. Holding on to proposition (4), he has to think that all willing is will to life, yet, at the same time, beyond what we can know, we might will differently. Right at the end of *The World as Will and Representation* he gives us another subtle clue. His very last words speak of “potentially willing differently [eventualiter *anders wollen*]” (WWR 2, 663). If that is possible for us, we must not be exclusively constituted by the will to life.

We have now argued that Schopenhauer’s notion of redemption would face fewer problems of interpretation if he had recognized willing that is distinct from will to life, and if he had applied the notion of negation only to willing directed at the happiness of the individual human being. His texts show that he does neither of these things unequivocally: hence, what I offer is openly a reconstruction. But why would the reconstruction be an improvement? I have argued, first, that it takes account of passages in which – in spite of his equation of all will with will to life – Schopenhauer implicitly recognizes “something in us” that is capable of willing “differently” or “otherwise [*anders*].” Thus, he implicitly allows for other kinds of willing that are not directed toward the happiness of the individual “I.” So one advantage of the reconstruction is that it builds upon a view that appears in the texts, even though it may be a minority view. I now wish to add some remarks on two other advantages of the reconstructive reading: It arguably goes some way toward showing how redemption and moral goodness can be related in the way that Schopenhauer hopes, and places Schopenhauer’s notion a little closer to the Buddhism that he invokes as cognate with his own notion of redemption.

7 Morality and Redemption

Schopenhauer continually insists that his account of morality and his account of redemption are of one piece. Thus he says that “from the same source that gives rise to all goodness, love, virtue and nobility there ultimately emerges also what I call the negation of the will to life” (WWR I, 405). Acting with compassion is supposed to be a step toward this negation of the will. The moral virtues of justice and loving kindness “encourage self-denial, and thus the negation of the will to life” (WWR 2, 621); loving kindness, in particular, quickly “leads to resignation” (WWR 2, 621). Yet, on some readings of Schopenhauer, the connection between his moral theory and his theory of redemption becomes so strained that his position is unsustainable. If moral action is to have only instrumental value, as

a means to advancing the agent toward total inaction and indifference to the world and its suffering, then the whole point of moral action seems, in the end, to be cancelled. The totally will-less agent will be freed from acting or even caring about the sufferings of other beings and will become that subject of stony apathy. In a recent article, Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell argue that there is a grand-scale contradiction in Schopenhauer's position, and that moral compassion and renunciation should rather be viewed as "two independent, mutually antagonistic ethical ideals"¹⁰ jostling within his system.

It is doubtful whether this issue can ever be fully resolved. However, if the highest value were to attach to a cessation of egoistic willing brought about by "something in us" that wills otherwise, a continuity between redemption and moral action becomes easier to accept. The ordinary moral agent sees other beings as sufferers whose suffering motivates her to action, but she does not thereby automatically cease to will egoistically and strive for the happiness of the individual "I." Schopenhauer somewhat obscures this point by emphasizing extreme moral actions that involve self-sacrifice, such as that of Arnold von Winkelried altruistically dying in battle (OBM, 196). But ordinary moral action is not like this. Through compassionate action I do not automatically cease to "will to preserve my existence," "will it free from pains," or indeed "will every pleasure of which I am capable" (Cf. OBM, 190): while not an egoist through and through, I remain an egoist who also acts morally. Nonetheless, such an agent can intelligibly be said to be on a path toward seeing through the delusion of "mineness" and realizing a total negation of egoistic willing. There is no obvious reason why such a person might not also continue to be a moral agent as she progressed further along the path. This thought is suggested also by an analogy with Buddhism as read by some recent commentators: "One standing at the goal of Buddhism [*Nirvāṇa*] has *both* moral virtue *and* deep insight."¹¹ Such a comparison is not wholly gratuitous, given Schopenhauer's invocation of Buddhism as sharing in the "important truth" about the need for redemption. I shall make a few more remarks on this topic in the next section.

¹⁰ Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell, "Compassion or Renunciation? That is the Question of Schopenhauer's Ethics," *Enrahonar: Quaderns de Filosofia* 55 (2015), 54. The theme is given extended treatment in Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Paul Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46. See also Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

8 Buddhism and the Will

If Schopenhauerian redemption were the elimination of willing directed to the happiness of the individual “I,” and not the elimination of all willing, then it would in a way be closer to Buddhism.¹² The origin of suffering in Buddhism is *taṇha* or *tr̥ṣṇa*, craving. As R. Raj Singh succinctly puts it, *tr̥ṣṇa* is “immoderate desire or craving rather than desire as such.”¹³ Discussing the will in early Buddhism, Bruce Matthews has emphasized that the Buddhist *arhat*, the enlightened or accomplished one, “still acts with a positive will, how he is still active” and that “one of the principal soteriological aims in early Buddhism is the re-direction, and not the suffocation, of the energy of the will.”¹⁴ If early Western interpreters tended not to see this, it was partially because their understanding of Buddhism was mediated through Schopenhauerian philosophy. “The mischief begins with Arthur Schopenhauer,” says Matthews,¹⁵ referring back to an essay by the early expert on the Pāli canon, Caroline Rhys Davids, who, writing in 1898 at the height of Schopenhauer’s influence, states that in early Buddhist ethics “it is not only that will as such, desire as such, are not to be repressed, but that the culture and development of them are absolutely indispensable to any advance towards the attainment of its ideals.”¹⁶ The idea of “stony, stultified apathy we often hear ascribed to Buddhism” arose in the nineteenth century because it was assumed that Buddhism shared Schopenhauer’s conception of will, and advocated the negation of all will.¹⁷ This suggests that with a deeper understanding of Buddhism Schopenhauer might not have been so confident in positing the negation of *all* willing as the highest good.

More recent philosophical writers on Buddhism suggest that the good is to cease grasping after things as “mine.” Thus, in her book *Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, Amber Carpenter writes:

¹² For a recent discussion of Schopenhauer and Buddhism, with a summary of some previous debates in the literature, see Ryan, “Schopenhauer and Gotama.” Ryan (*ibid.*, 383) makes the point that the treatment of suffering, will, and redemption attaches more to the early Pāli tradition, not Mahāyāna, a distinction to which Schopenhauer seems to attach little importance.

¹³ Raj R. Singh, “Suffering and Nirvāṇa in Schopenhauer’s Trans-Cultural Philosophy,” in Arati Barua, ed., *Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy: A Dialogue between India and Germany* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2008), 208.

¹⁴ Bruce Matthews, “Notes on the Concept of the Will in Early Buddhism,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 1 (1975), 160.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁶ Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, “On the Will in Buddhism,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1898), 50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

Valuing what is “I” and, by extension, what belongs to it, I long to make as much as possible belong to it, to let it grow and have dominion over its environment. This may be the sort of desire that is doomed to frustration – whether or not there is some such self – for it is an inherently unsatisfiable desire.¹⁸

The talk is of a “sort of desire”: if one stopped thinking of “I” and “mine,” some other sort of desire might remain. Schopenhauer recognizes this aspect of Buddhism, saying “in the *Manual of Buddhism* by Spence Hardy, p. 258, Buddha says: my students reject the idea ‘I am this’, or ‘this is mine’” (WWR 2, 629). Schopenhauer thus agrees with Buddhism on the importance of dispelling the delusion of “mineness,” or as Jay Garfield has put it, removing the “primal confusion” that is “to see the world as *my* world.”¹⁹ If this is where the true emphasis lies, there is no need to promote the notion of losing all desires, and becoming the inert stone-like subject that Rhys Davids found so un-Buddhist.

9 Conclusion

I have argued for a reconstruction that hinges on two simple thoughts: reject Schopenhauer’s claim that all willing is will to life, and reject his claim that redemption requires absence of all willing. Then we can construe Schopenhauer’s notion of redemption as an overturning of one’s nature, or denial of one’s self, in the sense that one loses the dispositions toward actions that center upon the happiness of the individual living being which we naturally regard as “I.” Schopenhauer wants to equate all willing with the naturalistic will to life, with the result that negation of the will to life would leave someone as a totally will-less, inert cognitive subject. Yet his thought does not settle comfortably at that point, because he also recognizes that there is a kind of willing that survives the loss of these self-centered dispositions, and there is “something in us” that is capable of willing “otherwise.” I have suggested that viewing redemption as the loss of egoistic willing through dispelling the delusion of “I” and “mine” may help to clarify an affinity between Schopenhauer and Buddhism that would be congenial to him. Finally, I have argued that the same reconstructive view may mitigate the conflict within Schopenhauer’s system between moral action and the state of redemption.

¹⁸ Amber D. Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2014), 21–2.

¹⁹ Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 10.

*Resignation**Bernard Reginster***1 Introduction: Pessimism and Resignation**

“Complete resignation,” or what Schopenhauer also calls the “negation of the will,” is his response to pessimism: the thesis “that we should be sorry rather than glad” about our life in this world, and “that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something that fundamentally should not to be” (WWR 2, chapter 46, 591–92; SW 3, 661). We can find in the recent scholarly literature roughly two views of this response. In one view, resignation is Schopenhauer’s way out of pessimism.¹ As the prospect for “true salvation, redemption from life and from suffering,” (WWR 1, §68, 424; SW 2, 470) it gives us a new, perhaps unexpected reason to live. Indeed, Schopenhauer explicitly claims that it gives us a reason to refrain from suicide (WWR 1, §69; PP 2, §157). In the other view, resignation does not defeat pessimism by giving us a fresh reason to live, but it provides a way out of an irreparably bad life.²

Considered closely, both views present difficulties. The first rests on a tempting interpretation of pessimism. It is widely agreed that Schopenhauer’s pessimism flows from two basic premises: suffering is bad, and it is inescapable. The distinctive feature of that interpretation is its understanding of the second premise: Suffering is inescapable insofar as it is unrelenting or “constant” – or, at least, it vastly outweighs the pleasures and satisfactions available in this life. By providing an effective escape from

¹ For example, Jordi Fernández, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, (2006): 646–64; Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Christopher Janaway, “What’s So Good about Negation of the Will?: Schopenhauer and the Problem of *Summum Bonum*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 54 (4), (2016): 649–69; and Christopher Janaway, “Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 26(2), (2018): 331–47.

² For example, Christopher Janaway, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed., Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 318–43 and Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2005).

suffering, resignation constitutes a way out of pessimism. While tempting, this interpretation is also questionable: The claim that ours is a life of unrelenting suffering is implausible, and there are reasons to suspect that Schopenhauer does not endorse it. According to the second view, resignation provides a way out of an irreparably bad life: It is the ultimate consequence of pessimism, not the overcoming of it. But it is notoriously puzzling why, in this view, resignation is preferable to outright suicide.

In this chapter, I pursue two main objectives. The first is to determine the *value* of resignation. The main question here is this: Resignation is a good, indeed the “highest good” available to us; how can it be a good that gives a reason to go on living and yet not give us a reason to be pleased that we are alive in the first place? The second objective is to discern the *character* of resignation. The central questions here are these: What kind of state is it, and how can it be achieved (if it can)? The first three sections of the chapter pertain to the first objective: section 2 describes the elusiveness of fulfillment; section 3 examines Schopenhauer’s explanation for it, the aimlessness of the will; and section 4 examines his claim that resignation can be the “highest good” only in a “figurative” sense.³ The remaining sections pertain to the second objective: Section 5 attempts to determine what kind of state resignation is; section 6 examines how it can be achieved; and section 7 briefly sketches out some questions about its very possibility.

2 The Elusiveness of Fulfillment

Schopenhauer takes more or less for granted the view that suffering is inherently bad, that is to say, bad because of how it feels, rather than because of its consequences.⁴ I will do so here as well, although not without emphasizing that he defines it as *unwanted* experience: “When an obstacle is placed between it [the will] and its temporary goal, we call this inhibition *suffering* [*Leiden*]” (WWR I, §56, 336; SW 2, 365). This definition underwrites the now familiar distinction between suffering and *pain*. As philosophers have recognized, it is possible to experience pain without feeling aversion toward it; in fact, we can welcome and seek out certain painful experiences for their own sake. It would be implausibly strained to deny that these experiences are still painful, but it would be equally odd to

³ These sections summarize an argument I develop in detail in “What is Schopenhauer’s Pessimism?” (manuscript).

⁴ For discussion of the badness of suffering, see, for example, Guy Kahane, “Pain, Experience, and Well-Being” in Guy Fletcher, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 209–20.

describe them as experiences of *suffering*, when they are so welcome or wanted.⁵

Schopenhauer appears committed to this distinction: for example, his view that ascetic practices aim at fostering “indifference” to various deprivations invites it (e.g., WWR 1 §68, 407; SW 2, 449). The deprivation presumably does not cease to cause pain (*Schmerz*) when it is no longer unwanted, but it ceases to constitute suffering. Unfortunately, his usage of these concepts does not rigorously keep to this distinction. For this reason, I will use the terms “pain” and “suffering” interchangeably, although I will always refer by both of them to the character of an experience that is disagreeable to the will, and therefore inherently bad.

The bulk of Schopenhauer’s argument for pessimism is devoted to the claim that suffering is inescapable. It is based on two premises: unsatisfied desire is painful, and we are “constantly” beset by some unsatisfied desire (WWR 1, §56, 336; SW 2, 365 and WWR 1, §57, 344; SW 2, 375). This suggests that human life is marred by unrelenting suffering. However, this conclusion is controversial, even by Schopenhauer’s own lights. Scholars often dispute the first premise by pointing out that unsatisfied desire is not necessarily painful. For example, it can evoke excitement or anticipation,⁶ a fact Schopenhauer recognizes when he speaks of the “pleasures of hope and anticipation” (PP 2, §153, 267; SW 6, 315).

Scholars are more favorably disposed toward the claim that we are “constantly” beset by some unsatisfied desire, for which they usually find the most compelling case in the following observation: “attainment quickly gives rise to satiety: the goal was only apparent; possession takes away the appeal [*Reiz*]: the desire, the need re-emerges in a new form: if not, then what follows is dreariness, emptiness, boredom, and the struggle against these is just as painful as the struggle against want” (WWR 1, §57, 340; SW 2, 370. Cf. WWR 1, §57, 338; SW 2, 367–68). Schopenhauer describes here a familiar pattern of experience: We desire some object – for example, love, wealth, power, fame, success, and so on; we devote our life to striving for it; we succeed in securing it; then our interest in it quickly dissipates, as does the pleasure we take in it; soon after boredom sets in. Roughly speaking, boredom is a state that follows upon the “satisfaction” of occurrent desires,

⁵ L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996), 98–112.

⁶ For example, Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, trans. H. Loiskandl, D. Weinstein, and M. Weinstein (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 64; Janaway, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” 333; and Ivan Soll, “Schopenhauer on the Inevitability of Unhappiness” in Bart Vandenabeele, ed. *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 302–03.

and so it cannot be a state resulting from their frustration. Boredom is also phenomenologically distinct from the diffuse dissatisfaction I feel at the satisfaction of occurrent desires that I seem to, but do not really, have: I seem to desire material wealth, for example, but the desire is a product of ideological indoctrination or peer pressure.

Boredom is instead a state in which I lose my interest in objects that, prior to their acquisition, genuinely captivated it: "Possession takes away the appeal." However, it is not simply a feeling of indifference; it is rather the feeling that something – though not something *determinate* – is left to be desired: "a wearied longing [*Sehnen*] without a definite object" (WWR 1, §29, 189; SW 2, 196. Cf. WWR 1, §65, 391; SW 2, 430). It is a kind of restless discontent, indeed a form of "suffering" that should not be "taken lightly" (WWR 1, §57, 339; SW 2, 369 and see WWR 1, §62, 376; SW 2, 413).

The discontent constitutive of boredom cannot result from the failure to satisfy your determinate desires: you may well get the love, the wealth, or the power you desired. The root of the discontent is that the satisfaction of your desires fails to deliver what you expected from it. Schopenhauer identifies the object of this expectation: It is "fulfillment [*Erfüllung*]," "an ultimate satisfaction for the will, following which there will be no new willing," or "lasting fulfillment that gives perfect and permanent satisfaction to its strivings" (WWR 1, §65, 389; SW 2, 428). From the perspective of the desire driving you, its object "always promises [*verspricht*] full satisfaction, and that it will quench the thirst of the will" (WWR 1, §60, 353; SW 2, 386). Eventually, you "must necessarily experience the fact that all satisfaction is only illusory and that acquisition does not achieve what desire had expected [*versprach*], namely the ultimate quenching of the fierce impulse of the will" (WWR 1, §65, 391; SW 2, 430).

The susceptibility to boredom would be significant, then, because it shows that our life is marred by unrelenting suffering. It is worthy of emphasis because it shows that some of the forms suffering assumes can be subtle, and therefore easy to underestimate. In Schopenhauer's memorable summation, "life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom" (WWR 1, §57, 338; SW 2, 367–68). Familiar though it may be, the pattern of experience Schopenhauer describes here does *not*, in his own view, actually obtain in the lives of most people: "For most human beings, this is what life is all about: they will, they know what they will, and strive after it with enough success to protect them from despair and enough failure to keep them from boredom and its effects. A certain cheerfulness or at least composure emerges from this" (WWR 1, §60, 353; SW 2, 386). For most people, then, striving is successful enough to avert despair, but also

unsuccessful enough to prevent the onset of boredom. If we recall that the experience of unsatisfied desires, as well as the experience of the “striving” for their satisfaction, can evoke the pleasure of anticipation, and if we now suppose with Schopenhauer that satisfaction occurs reliably enough to avert worry or despair, but not so easily as to leave one prey to boredom, then it seems that, on balance, human life can be pleasant enough (WWR 1, §57, 340; SW 2, 370). It does not seem to be the sort of unrelenting misery that would merit pessimistic repudiation.

By Schopenhauer’s own lights, then, the significance of the susceptibility to boredom, and of the elusiveness of fulfillment it exposes, cannot be primarily *experiential*: They are not meant to show that human life is marred by constant suffering. Close scrutiny reveals that he locates the significance of these phenomena elsewhere: It is primarily *axiological*.

To see this, we must return to his analysis of boredom. Even though it follows upon the satisfaction of our occurrent determinate desires, and so cannot result from their frustration, it is, nevertheless, a form of suffering, and, therefore, frustration. It is natural and plausible to explain this sense of frustration in terms of the other distinctive feature of boredom, namely, the loss of interest in the objects of our desires, incurred soon after securing their possession. *It* is the source of frustration, presumably because it frustrates a less determinate desire, namely, the desire to be “interested.”

We want there to be objects in the world that “appeal” to, or “interest,” us. Now, an object is “appealing” or “interesting” insofar as it “somehow arouses [the] *will*” (WWR 1, §55, 340; SW 2, 370). To be interesting, then, the object must be either *desired*, or *desirable*. If objects were interesting to us by virtue of being desirable, they would not cease to be interesting once their possession is secured, for they would continue to inspire desire. To be desirable in this way, objects would have to have *intrinsic* value (“absolute value,” or “value in itself”). The susceptibility to boredom, to our losing interest in the objects of our desires, thus demonstrates that they lack intrinsic value; this is the reason why their possession cannot “fulfill” us:

That human existence must be a kind of mistake emerges sufficiently from the simple observation that a human being is a concretion of needs, whose satisfaction, difficult as it is to achieve, provides him with nothing more than a painless state in which he is still abandoned to boredom, which simply proves that existence has no value in itself, for boredom is precisely the sensation of the emptiness of existence. If life, in the craving for which our essence and existence consist, had a positive value and real substance in itself, then there could be no boredom; instead, mere existence in itself would have to fulfill [*erfüllen*] and satisfy us. (PP 2, §146, 259; SW 6, 305)

These considerations shed important light on the character of fulfillment. It is not simply a condition in which willing comes to an end, a state of indifference to the condition of the world. It is rather a condition of “final” or “complete and permanent” *satisfaction*, in which the world is perfectly matched to all of one’s desires. So understood, fulfillment has two basic features. First, it is a state devoid of *longing*, the disquieting experience of “dissatisfaction” with one’s present condition when it is perceived to be “lacking” in some way or other. Second, fulfillment is not “will-less” quietude, but instead consists of an *interested engagement* with the objects of our desires.

To allow for such interested engagement, the objects of our desires must have two salient characteristics. They must have *intrinsic* value, by which Schopenhauer means that their value is independent from our desires. Only then, do they not cease to be “interesting,” or lose their “appeal,” once their possession has been secured. Only an intrinsically good object can constitute “an ultimate motive whose accomplishment will give lasting satisfaction to the will” (WWR 1, §65, 389; SW 2, 427). In addition, these objects must have *positive* value. Positive value is the character of something whose value consists in more than the removal or absence of an evil. Fulfillment presumably requires the satisfaction of backward-looking desires, specifically, the removal of *regret*. The persistent wish that, in some respects, things had been otherwise is incompatible with being fulfilled. To deliver genuine fulfillment, in other words, the possession of an object must justify, or compensate for, or at least outweigh, the evils that befell us along the way, thus removing any ground for regret. This is possible only if the object has positive value.

All this indicates that the value of fulfillment does not simply lie in the fact that it offers freedom from suffering. It lies in the fact that it offers engagement with intrinsic and positive goods. The elusiveness of fulfillment and the susceptibility to boredom that reveals it are significant, then, by showing that nothing in our world has intrinsic and positive value. But how can boredom “prove” this? Could it not instead signal a defect *in us*, our inability to recognize the intrinsic and positive value of certain objects? To answer these questions, we must turn to Schopenhauer’s explanation for the elusiveness of fulfillment: the aimlessness of the will.

3 The Aimlessness of the Will

The elusiveness of fulfillment reveals an essential characteristic of the will, namely, it is “aimless”:

Everything that these remarks should clarify, the unattainable nature of lasting satisfaction and the negativity of all happiness, is explained by what we showed at the end of the Second Book: namely that the will, which is objectified in human life as it is in every appearance, is a striving without aim and without end [*ein Streben ohne Ziel und ohne Ende*]. (WWR 1, §58, 347; SW 2, 378)

At first glance, this is a tempting explanation for the fact that the satisfaction of desires is quickly followed by other desires or by boredom. As Fernández observes: “if we get bored once we achieve what we apparently want, it is simply because we did not really want it in the first place.”⁷

But the thesis that the will is *aimless* is problematic by Schopenhauer’s own lights, not least because he presents having an intentional object as a *conceptual* requirement of willing (FW, 40; SW 4, 14; cf. WWR 1, §29, 187; SW 2, 194). For this reason, scholars have argued that we should abandon this view, or at least qualify it.⁸ I propose a simple interpretation for this puzzling claim. To say that the will is aimless is not to deny that it has an intentional object, but rather to say that its intentional object does not *explain* the willing. The object *appears* to inspire the willing of it – presumably because it appears to the subject to have value “in itself.” But this appearance (which might underwrite its “promise” of fulfillment) is misleading: “People only seem to be pulled from the front, in fact they are pushed from behind: it is not that life attracts them, but rather that they are driven forward by need” (WWR 2, chapter 28, 374; SW 3, 410).

So understood, the claim that the will is “aimless” is essentially equivalent to another, less paradoxical claim Schopenhauer repeatedly makes: “the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain, which is its primordial destiny by virtue of its essence” (WWR 1, §57, 338; SW 2, 367–68). Thus, he describes willing as a kind of “thirst”: just as we find water attractive only *because* we are thirsty, so objects owe their attractiveness to the fact that they are “needed.” And the human being is “the neediest of all beings”: “he is the concretion of a thousand needs” (WWR 1, §57, 338; SW 2, 368. Cf. PP 2, §146, 259; SW 6, 305).

This conception of motivation accounts for the elusiveness of fulfillment by explaining the susceptibility to boredom. While it seems as though the subject “would recognize something as *good* and will it only as a result of

⁷ Fernández, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” 655; cf. Janaway, “Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will,” 332.

⁸ Mark Migotti, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism and the Unconditioned Good,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33(4), (1995), 647; Fernández, “Schopenhauer’s Pessimism,” 654; and Janaway, “Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will,” 341–43.

this, instead of *willing* it first and calling it *good* as a result of that” (WWR 1, §55, 319; SW 2, 345), this is, according to Schopenhauer’s “whole fundamental outlook [*ganze Grundansicht*],” “a reversal of the true relation”: It is because he wills the object that it appears good to him. This is an implication of the conception of desires as expressions of needs: Strictly speaking, we do not need something because we recognize its intrinsic value; needs are essentially endogenous and the value of their objects – their “appeal” – is constituted by the fact that they are needed. As a consequence, the object of our desire is bound to lose its “appeal” as soon as our need for it disappears, and the need for it disappears as soon as its possession has been secured: Water ceases to be attractive when our thirst is quenched (see WWR 1, §58, 345; SW 2, 376).

Some scholars object that the satisfaction of a desire does not necessarily remove it.⁹ But Schopenhauer’s claim that “desire ends with satisfaction” (WWR 1, §58, 345; SW 2, 376) is only intended to apply to his conception of desire as the expression of a need. If the value of the objects of our desires is constituted by the fact that we need them, then the aim of satisfying our desires cannot be to secure possession of their objects as such, but only insofar it appeases the underlying need, that is to say, to remove the “pain” or “importunity” of the desire aroused by its flare-up. The object’s value, in other words, is essentially *negative*: “we never gain anything more than liberation from the suffering of desire, and so we find ourselves just the way we were before we had the desire” (WWR 1, §58, 345–46; SW 2, 377). From the perspective of the desiring subject, there is nothing of *positive* value to be gained from satisfaction: It is only as a scratch to his itch.

At this point, however, Schopenhauer’s argument appears to rely again on the controversial claim that unsatisfied desire is painful. But we have now learned that it is only because “the basis of all willing is need,” that pain is the “primordial destiny” of desire (WWR 1, §57, 338; SW 2, 367–68). Recall the common objection mentioned earlier: The experience of unsatisfied desire may be accompanied by excitement and anticipation. This objection locates the pleasure not in the unsatisfied desire *as such*, but in the representation of its satisfaction. I can experience some delight in my hunger by contemplating the prospect of the delicious meal awaiting me at home; take away this prospect, or put it into serious doubt, and that delight will disappear. But Schopenhauer’s argument does not depend on the view that the experience of unsatisfied desire is necessarily painful; it only depends on the less controversial view that desires would be a source of

⁹ Soll, “Schopenhauer on the Inevitability of Unhappiness,” 306.

suffering *only if left unsatisfied*. Admittedly, though, even this view is questionable, for I can leave many of my desires unsatisfied and not suffer as a result. But Schopenhauer operates with a specific view of desire: If all desires are expressions of needs, then their satisfaction is not “optional,” not something one can more or less indifferently take or leave.

This fact is reflected in the phenomenology of need-based motivation. According to a view that became orthodoxy in the great drive psychologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹⁰ when a need flares up, it typically becomes manifest in the subject’s consciousness in the form of an unpleasant sensation. For example, the need for food causes pangs of hunger. This motivates the agent to engage in some sort of interaction with the surrounding world – for example, acquiring and consuming food – which aims to eliminate the unpleasant sensation.

4 The Highest Good

Only fulfillment can be the “highest good” in a strict, literal sense: “highest good or *summum bonum* . . . [denotes] properly an ultimate satisfaction for the will, following which there is no new willing, an ultimate motive whose accomplishment gives lasting satisfaction to the will” (WWR I, §65, 389; SW 2, 428). Schopenhauer suggests that, if it were possible, the prospect of fulfillment would justify human existence and thus foreclose pessimism. According to a tempting interpretation, the fulfillment would foreclose pessimism by virtue of being a condition of complete and lasting *freedom from suffering*. As a consequence, if an alternative way of achieving freedom from suffering could be found, it would constitute a *way out* of pessimism.

I have begun to raise doubts about this view of the value of fulfillment. Schopenhauer explicitly rejects it when he denies that the state of “will-lessness,” achieved through resignation, constitutes a genuine *alternative* to fulfillment. If we insist on referring to it as “the highest good,” he argues, it may only be so in a “figurative” sense. Presumably, this is because “will-lessness” resembles fulfillment in one respect, but also falls short of it in another.

Like fulfillment, it is a state free from “longing,” the disquieting experience of “dissatisfaction” with one’s present condition when it is perceived to be “lacking.” Unlike fulfillment, “will-lessness” is not a good that gives a reason to welcome our existence. It is not without value, of course, but its

¹⁰ See Robert W. White, “Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence,” *Psychological Review*, 66(5), (1959): 297–333.

value is merely *negative*: “We can look upon it as the only radical cure for the disease against which all other goods – such as fulfilled wishes and achieved happiness – are only palliatives, only anodynes” (WWR 1, §65, 389; SW 2, 428). The “disease” is our suffering human existence, and while will-lessness is a genuine “cure” for it – it is “true salvation, redemption from life and from suffering” (WWR 1, §68, 424; SW 2, 470) – it does not *justify* it: It does not give us a reason to welcome being afflicted by it in the first place. It provides an escape from this evil, but it cannot make up for it.

Besides “will-lessness,” Schopenhauer acknowledges the existence of a number of other goods. For example, he concedes that in favorable circumstances, at least, we can achieve a substantial measure of happiness. And he extols the value of aesthetic contemplation and compassion. On what grounds does he maintain that these goods only have negative value? Compassion, for example, could be grounded in the intrinsic and positive value of human dignity.¹¹ But Schopenhauer denies this: The value of a compassionate action lies entirely in the fact that, by alleviating suffering, it removes or ameliorates an evil (e.g., OBM, §18, 165). And what is true of compassion is also true of happiness and aesthetic contemplation: “in truth their nature is solely negative, only the termination of an evil” (WWR 1 §67, 402; SW 2, 443).

The answer, he suggests, is rooted in “the simple observation that a human being is a concretion of needs” (PP 2, §146, 259; SW 6, 305). As we saw in section 3, the fact that our desires are ultimately expressions of needs entails that the only “value” we can see in the objects of our desires is *extrinsic* and *negative*. They matter insofar as they gratify a need and, by virtue of doing so, insofar as they remove the pain its arousal causes. This does not show, strictly speaking, that these objects are actually devoid of intrinsic and positive value. But it shows that they could not matter to human beings as such since the only motivational relation they can have to these objects is that which is underwritten by their needs.

Schopenhauer argues that the concept of “good” is best analyzed in terms of “agreeableness to the will” (WWR 1, §65, 387; SW 2, 425). As a *sufficient* condition of goodness, “agreeableness to the will” is controversial: I can disvalue an object even though it satisfies my desire. But this analysis matters to his argument only insofar as it states a *necessary* condition of “goodness”: It expresses the widely accepted *internalist* constraint on evaluation, namely, it must be capable of motivating. This implies that

¹¹ For an interpretation of Schopenhauer along these lines, see Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 180–87.

what counts as “good” for a human being is constrained by his motivational equipment. If “a human being is a concretion of needs,” and “the basis of all willing is need,” then “goodness” for him can only be extrinsic and negative.

All the goods Schopenhauer recognizes to be available to us are therefore *negative* goods. They are genuine goods, which give us reason to go on living, even if they do so to varying degrees. The negation of the will is the “highest,” and “the only compelling moral reason against suicide” (PP 2, §157, 279; SW 6, 328) because only it offers a “complete and permanent” deliverance from suffering: “the fact that suicide is counter to achieving the highest moral goal insofar as it substitutes a merely illusory redemption [*Erlösung*] from this world of misery for the real one” (PP 2 §157; 279/328; WWR 1 §69). Other goods, such as happiness, aesthetic contemplation, and compassion are “only palliatives, only anodynes” because they provide only incomplete and temporary freedom from suffering (e.g., WWR 1, §68, 417; SW 2, 462; see WWR 1, §38, 220; SW 2, 231). But none of these goods give us a reason to be glad that we are alive in the first place for they cannot justify the evil of our suffering existence or even compensate for it.¹² Supposing otherwise would be perverse: If the value of alleviating suffering were a reason to welcome the fact that we exist at all, then it would provide a justification for suffering itself. It would amount to saying that evil is justified by the fact that its existence offers the opportunity to eliminate it.

The inescapability of suffering is the ground of pessimism, but not by implying that ours is a life of unrelenting suffering, or that suffering is bound to vastly outweigh the pleasures and satisfactions available in it.¹³ Instead, it shows that our life is essentially marred by an evil from which there is an escape, but for which there is no justification. Thus, as Schopenhauer provocatively puts it, “the mere existence of evil decides the matter, since evil can never be wiped off, and consequently can never be balanced, by the good that exists along with or after it. ‘A thousand pleasures are not worth a *single* sorrow’ (Petrarch)” (WWR 2, chapter 46, 591; SW 3, 661).

¹² Janaway, “What’s So Good about Negation of the Will?,” 657, argues that the value of negation of life is not “second-best” to that of fulfillment. I agree that they are *different kinds* of goods, which do not admit of straightforward lexical ordering; but they are comparable because they have an important “good-making” property in common (absence of suffering), and the purely *negative* character of the former makes it arguably inferior to the latter: It cannot justify existence. See also Janaway, “Schopenhauer on the Aimlessness of the Will.”

¹³ For example, Young, *Schopenhauer*, 218.

5 The Character of Resignation

The state of “will-lessness” is achieved through what Schopenhauer calls “complete resignation [*gänzliche Resignation*]” (WWR I, §68, 424; SW 2, 470). The concept of resignation (in German as in English) has two primary meanings. On the one hand, it designates a kind of grudging acceptance (as in ‘being resigned to one’s fate’), while on the other it refers to withdrawal, disengagement, or detachment (as in ‘resigning one’s professional post’). The two meanings may be connected, but for our purposes, there remains an important distinction. In one sense, resignation is the acceptance, and endurance, of the frustration of one’s desires, and of the suffering it causes; one may renounce the *pursuit* of these desires, but remain attached to them. In a second sense, by contrast, resignation is a complete detachment from the desires themselves: “the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life” (WWR I, §51, 280; SW 2, 299). Schopenhauer believes that Stoicism advocates for resignation in the first sense: Stoic *ataraxia* “is not a happy state but only the calm endurance of suffering seen as inevitable” (WWR 2, chapter 16, 168; SW 3, 174; WWR 2, chapter 37, 451; SW 3, 496). This form of resignation is only endurance, rather than surrender. Even as it acknowledges the inevitability of their frustration, it holds on to the desires. This is because the Stoics typically attribute the inevitability of suffering, not to the essential nature of our will as an “unquenchable thirst,” but to the circumstances of the external world and the limitations in our power to control or alter them.¹⁴

Schopenhauer advocates for resignation in the second sense, or “complete resignation,” even though he recognizes that, in the terms of his philosophical views, it seems impossible:

The contradiction between our claim, on the one hand, that there is a necessary determination of the will through motives in accordance with character, and our claim, on the other hand, that it is possible to completely abolish the will, is only a repetition in philosophical reflection of a *real* contradiction which comes when freedom of the will in itself, a freedom that knows no necessity, interferes directly in the necessity of its appearance. The key to reconciling these contradictions is that the state in which the character is removed from the power of the motive does not proceed immediately from the will, but rather from an altered mode of cognition [*veränderten Erkenntnißweise*]. (WWR I, §70, 430; SW 2, 477)

¹⁴ This “Stoicism of disposition” has a pernicious effect: by fostering the ability to endure suffering, it makes it easier to tolerate, and thereby “stands in the way of true salvation” (PP 2, §170, 288; SW 6, 340). This is because intolerable suffering can induce the “altered mode of cognition” that is a necessary condition of resignation.

Motivation is “causality that goes through *cognition*” (FW, 54; SW 4, 31): The representation of a state of affairs determines my will to act with necessity. How, then, could motives lose their causal influence? In Schopenhauer’s philosophical psychology, the *character* is that which accounts for the influence of “motives” in causing the agent to act. For example, it is in virtue of my benevolent character that my representation of the fact that another needs help has *motivational force* for me.

Schopenhauer holds that, in the ordinary course of things, an agent’s character is “unalterable.” This suggests that the causal influence of motives on her actions is also unalterable. However, it is undeniable that motives that once had power for the agent may lose it, and motives that did not have power may acquire it. This is explained by a change not in the agent’s character, but in her cognition. Thus, she may discover a previously unknown inclination toward certain objects or states of affairs, the prospect of which now becomes a motive for her; the power of the new motive may, by comparison, reduce the power of older ones; or the consideration of past and future motives, possible through abstraction by the faculty of reason, might cause some present, immediately compelling motive to lose some of its power. While ordinary knowledge can thus modulate the causal power of motives, it cannot remove it entirely. The very possibility of complete resignation is therefore in question: How could the agent escape the influence of motives *altogether*?

To resolve this difficulty, Schopenhauer appeals to an “altered mode of cognition,” the possibility of which he identified in aesthetic experience. The distinction of aesthetic experience is that it is a *disinterested* form of cognition, in which objects lose their motivational power: “our attention is no longer directed to the motives of willing but instead grasps things free from their relation to the will, and hence considers them without interests, without subjectivity, purely objectively; we are given over to the things entirely, to the extent that they are mere representations, not to the extent that they are motives” (WWR I, §38, 220; SW 2, 231).

The mechanism operating in resignation is identical with the mechanism at work in aesthetic experience. It is because they possess a “clear and significant form,” by virtue of which they “turn readily into representatives of their Ideas,”¹⁵ that objects “invite us to pure contemplation” (WWR I,

¹⁵ The standing of Ideas in Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is notoriously murky. Here, I simply treat “Ideas” as aspects of things as they are “in themselves.” For recent discussion of this doctrine, see Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, “How Platonic Are Schopenhauer’s Platonic Ideas?” in Sandra Shapshay, ed., *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 43–64 and Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 44–60.

§39, 225; SW 2, 236–37). Schopenhauer suggests that the ubiquity of suffering might induce me to reflect upon it and, by the very fact of assuming such an “objective” or “spectator” stance toward it, dissociate myself from it and thus achieve a measure of tranquility (WWR 1, §69, 427; SW 2, 473).¹⁶

In the present case, of course, the subject matter – my own misery – is of great interest to me, and this is bound to create resistance to a transition to a purely disinterested viewpoint. But Schopenhauer observes that this resistance can be overcome, as it evidently is in a particular kind of aesthetic experience, the experience of the *sublime*. In this form of experience, “the very objects whose significant form invite us to pure contemplation have a hostile relation to the human will in general,” as a consequence of which, “that state of pure cognition is gained only by means of a violent tearing free from the relationships between the same object and the will . . . by means of a free and conscious elevation over the will and the cognition relating to it” (WWR 1, §39, 225–26; SW 2, 237–38).¹⁷

The “tranquillizing” effect of aesthetic contemplation affords a momentary release from “the endless stream of willing” (WWR 1, §38, 220; SW 2, 231). Such release gives the individual a sampling of the peace, to which he aspires even when he pursues the satisfaction of his desires (WWR 1, §68, 417; SW 2, 461). But it neither constitutes, nor is even sufficient to motivate, “complete resignation,” the “abolition” or “negation” of the will. This, Schopenhauer claims, requires an “act of the freedom of the will”:

Now as we have seen, the *self-abolition* of the will begins with cognition, but cognition and insight as such are independent of free choice [*Willkür*]; consequently, that negation of the will, that entrance into freedom [*Freiheit*] cannot be forced by intention or resolution, but rather emerges from the innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings, and thus arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside. That is precisely why the church calls it the *effect of divine grace*; but just as the church thinks that this is still dependent on the acceptance of grace, the effect of the tranquillizer is also ultimately an act of the freedom of the will. (WWR 1, §70, 432; SW 2, 478. Cf. WWR 1, §68, 418; SW 2, 463)

¹⁶ Besides the “significant form” of the object, Schopenhauer says that aesthetic experience also requires an “inner disposition,” specifically “a preponderance of cognition over willing” (WWR 1, §38, 220; SW 2, 232) in which is grounded the “capacity . . . to withdraw cognition that originally existed only in its service to the will from this service” (WWR 1, §36, 209; SW 2, 219). I leave this complication aside.

¹⁷ For recent contrasting interpretations of Schopenhauer’s conception of the sublime, see Alex Neil, “Schopenhauer on Tragedy and the Sublime” in Vandenabeele, *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, 206–18 and Sandra Shapshay, “Schopenhauer’s Transformation of the Kantian Sublime,” *Kantian Review*, 17(3), (2012), 479–511.

The tranquillizing cognition is “independent of free choice,” and yet it is an “entrance into freedom.” It cannot be an act of free choice for a simple reason. Since the very fact that the tranquillizing cognition requires breaking free from “slavery to the will,” it cannot be a product of willing: “The requisite alteration in the subject cannot proceed from the will precisely because it consists of the elimination of all willing and thus cannot be an act of free choice, i.e. it cannot be up to us” (WWR 2, chapter 30, 384; SW 3, 419). This is why, like Christian “grace,” it “arrives suddenly, as if flying from outside.” At the same time, this cognition is an “entrance into freedom” insofar as it brings about a condition in which I am free from the “power” of motives that, up to that moment, had determined my will with necessity: “*motives* that had previously been so violent lose their power, and in their place, complete cognition of the essence of the world acts as a *tranquillizer* [Quietiv] of the will and leads to resignation, the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life” (WWR 1, §51, 280; SW 2, 299).

Schopenhauer distinguishes between “tranquility” and “negation of the will.” The former is described as “leading” or “giving rise” to the other: “the *negation of the will* . . . comes on the scene *after* complete recognition of its own essence has become a tranquilizer of all willing” (WWR 1, §68, 410; SW 2, 453; the second emphasis is mine). The tranquility produced by an alteration in the “mode of cognition” is an instance of the “peace of mind,” in which “salvation” is also supposed to consist. But it becomes salvation only when the individual turns against his own will and systematically “negates” it. As we saw, unlike mere tranquility, this “complete self-abolition of the will” actually requires an “act of freedom of the will” (cf. WWR 2, chapter 54, 311; SW 3, 336; WWR 2, chapter 55, 328; SW 3, 355).

6 The Function of Asceticism

By definition, an act of freedom of will cannot be determined. But for freedom to be exercised in the “negation of the will,” there must be a special incentive. After all, the “altered mode of cognition” that constitutes an “entrance into freedom” by depriving motives of their “power” already occurs in aesthetic contemplation, but such contemplation does not necessarily issue in a “negation of the will.” The *content* of the cognition, rather than in its *mode*, provides the incentive for resignation: “the negation of the will, which is what people call complete resignation or holiness, comes from the tranquillizer of the will, and this is the recognition of the will’s inner

conflict and its essential nothingness, which expresses itself in the suffering of all living things" (WWR 1, §68, 424; SW 2, 470).¹⁸

Cognition becomes an incentive to resignation when its content is the "essential nothingness" of the will, or what we described earlier as its "aimlessness" (section 3). How does knowledge of this particular content bring about resignation? In Schopenhauer's view, ascetic self-deprivation plays an essential role: "I have often used the expression *asceticism*, and I understand by it, in this narrow sense, this *deliberate* breaking of the will by foregoing what is pleasant and seeking out what is unpleasant, choosing a lifestyle of penitence and self-castigation for the constant mortification of the will" (WWR 1, §68, 419; SW 2, 463). At first glance, Schopenhauer's view of the role of asceticism looks rather straightforward: Ascetic self-deprivation is grounded in the recognition that the ultimate cause of suffering must be found in *the will* itself, rather than in the contingent circumstances of the world, and it is a practice aiming at its "mortification."

Thus, asceticism has three distinctive characteristics. First, the ground of ascetic self-mortification is "self-knowledge": "So he takes to fasting, he takes to castigation and self-torture in order to keep breaking and deadening the will through constant deprivation and suffering, since he recognizes and abhors the will as the source of his own suffering existence and that of the world" (WWR 1, §68, 409; SW 2, 451). Second, asceticism is deliberate. Since it proceeds from a state in which the will has been "tranquilized," it cannot result from the causal determination of "motives": "In general, the negation of the will does not follow from suffering with anything like the necessity of an effect from its cause, but rather the will remains free. In fact, this is the only place where its freedom emerges directly into appearance" (WWR 1, §68, 422; SW 2, 467). Finally, the ascetic seeks deprivation *for its own sake*, or perhaps more precisely for the sole sake of *mortification* of the will, rather than, for example, to improve the lot of others. His "voluntary and intentional poverty does not arise accidentally, by giving away property to alleviate other people's suffering, but as a goal in itself, and should serve as the constant mortification of the will" (WWR 1, §68, 408; SW 2, 451).

How does one "mortify the will"? To answer this question, we must first ask what the condition of "salvation" is, which mortification is intended to bring about. Schopenhauer describes it in decidedly *experiential* terms: "if

¹⁸ Unlike other art forms, the tragic drama motivates the negation of the will precisely because of its distinctive cognitive *content*: "the true tendency of tragedy, the final goal of the intentional portrayal of human suffering, remains the appeal for the will to turn away from life" (WWR 2, chapter 37, 452; SW 3, 497).

the negation of the will has arisen in someone, that person is full of inner joy and true heavenly peace, . . . a profound calm and inner serenity” (WWR I, §68, 416–17; SW 2, 461), or “imperturbable confidence and cheerfulness” (WWR I, §71, 439; SW 2, 486. Cf. WWR I, §68, 425; SW 2, 471). This indicates that what he regards as *good* about the negation of life is not just the *absence* of suffering, but also the *experience* of this absence. This makes sense: Just as suffering is essentially an *experiential* state, which is evil, presumably, *because of how it feels*, so too, we might expect, is the *absence* of suffering good *because of how it feels*. In order to bring about such a state, the mortification of the will cannot be the indefinite struggle of the will against itself, but it must be a process whereby the will – specifically, the desires that express it – is eventually extinguished. It must eventually issue in “will-lessness [*Willenlosigkeit*].”

Schopenhauer’s attempts at explaining the phenomenon of “mortification” draw on an essential relation between desire and suffering: To desire something is, at the very least, *not to be indifferent* to deprivation of it (see WWR I, §16, 114; SW 2, 104). If I can manage to become indifferent to being deprived of something I want, then, arguably, my desire for it has been extinguished or, as Schopenhauer sometimes puts it, it has “died.” He discusses two different mechanisms by which such indifference could be produced.

The first, *asceticism* proper, employs systematic self-deprivation to ensure “that no satisfaction of wishes, the sweets of life, can excite the will loathed by self-knowledge” (WWR I, §68, 408; SW 2, 451). It is difficult to discern precisely the mechanism at work here, but a basic feature of ascetic practices provides a hint. Schopenhauer emphasizes that ascetic practices are *systematic*, that is to say, comprehensive and unrelenting. A natural effect of systematic deprivation is to create *habituation* to it, which in turn allows the ascetic “to steel himself with the greatest indifference toward all things” (WWR I, §68, 407; SW 2, 449). This evokes the operation of the mechanism of *hedonic adaptation*, a mechanism Schopenhauer explicitly recognizes in the case of pleasure (WWR 2, chapter 46, 590; SW 3, 660). The more we become accustomed to deprivation, the less we are pained by it. And the less pained we are by deprivation, the less we care about its object, and the less we desire it.¹⁹

¹⁹ Harry Helson, *Adaptation Level Theory* (Harper & Row, 1964), offers a classic statement of the theory of hedonic adaptation. For a recent influential application, see, for example, P. Brickman, D. Coates, and R. Janoff-Bulman, “Lottery Winners and Accident Victims, Is Happiness Relative?,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(8), (1978): 917–27.

Schopenhauer also resorts to the metaphor of “nourishment” to characterize the effect of satisfying our desires: He describes the satisfaction of particular desires as providing “nourishment” for the will. This metaphor is grounded in his view that the will is “objectified” in the *body*. Satisfying the will is fulfilling the needs of the body, thus replenishing its energy reserves and strengthening it. Systematic deprivation, by contrast, is bound to “enfeeble” it. Schopenhauer appears committed to the view that mental activities (thinking, desiring, and so on) require energy, and that mental energy ultimately depends on *physical* energy, the energy of the body. Enfeebling the body would therefore sap the individual’s very *ability* to desire: “for instance, Tauler speaks of the total poverty that you are supposed to seek, which consists in fully relinquishing and abandoning everything that might provide comfort or worldly pleasure, clearly because this is a constant source of nourishment for the will, while the intention is to deaden it completely” (WWR I, §68, 416; SW 2, 460).²⁰

Schopenhauer says that the mortification of the will proceeds from an intentional practice of systematic deprivation, motivated by the knowledge that the will is the ultimate source of suffering, only “in general” (WWR I, §68, 422; SW 2, 467). This suggests that this knowledge might sometimes produce mortification through another, perhaps nonintentional mechanism. In fact, he discusses an alternative mechanism of mortification, which draws on a particular form of what he calls the “innermost relation of cognition to willing in human beings.” Cognition, as we saw, may alter the “power” of motives in two ways: by informing the agent of what can more effectively satisfy his will; and by “tranquilizing” the will when, for example, the fascination exercised by a beautiful object temporarily suspends the interest the agent ordinarily takes in it. In this latter case, the influence of the will is suspended, but not altogether *negated*. Schopenhauer suggests that a certain kind of cognition can also *negate* the will.

In this case, knowledge of the *necessity* of suffering does not simply motivate intentional self-deprivation, which then eventually produces the mortification of the will; rather, that knowledge *itself* directly produces mortification. He usually discusses this mechanism in connection with Stoicism. The sole recognition of the “inevitability” of suffering can produce “Stoic indifference towards our own, present troubles”:

²⁰ It is obviously hard to see how this view of resignation could escape the objection that it is more a condition of exhausted apathy than one of “cheerfulness” or “joy.” For this line of objection against asceticism in general, see, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), III §17. See also section 7 below.

our impatience with these troubles comes primarily from the fact that we recognize them as accidental, introduced by a chain of causes that could easily have been otherwise. For instance, we do not worry about immediately necessary and completely universal troubles, e.g., the necessity of age and death and a host of daily inconveniences. It is rather the thought that the circumstances bringing some suffering to us in particular are in some way accidental – this is what gives them their sting. But when we have recognized that pain as such is essential to life and unavoidable, and the only element of chance is in the shape or form in which pain presents itself . . . if we recognized all this, then this reflection, if it becomes a living conviction [*eine lebendige Überzeugung*], could bring about a significant measure of Stoic equanimity and lessen our anxious concern for our well-being. (WWR 1, §57, 341–42; SW 2, 373. Cf. WWR 1, §55, 333; SW 2, 361–62)

It appears to be a matter of psychological fact that people who become convinced of the impossibility of satisfying a desire are less distressed by its frustration. What is the mechanism underlying it? How can the knowledge of the impossibility of satisfying it induce the agent to renounce not simply the *pursuit* of that desire, but the *desire* itself?

Schopenhauer's answer begins with the "Stoic insight" that it is not simply the lack of some object that causes suffering, but the fact of desiring it and yet lacking it. But the crucial factor emerges from a further observation:

Moreover, experience shows that it is only the hope [*die Hoffnung*], the claim [*der Anspruch*] to something, that gives birth to the wish and nourishes it; so we are not disturbed or troubled by the many unavoidable ills that are common to everyone nor by goods no one can attain, but only by the trivial More or Less of what the individual can avoid or attain. Indeed experience only shows that not only what is absolutely unattainable but also what is relatively unattainable or unavoidable does not disturb us in the least; therefore, the ills we start out with as individuals and also the goods that must necessarily be denied us are regarded with indifference, so that, true to this human peculiarity, every wish soon dies and cannot arouse any more pain, so long as there is no hope for it to feed on. It followed from all this . . . that all suffering in fact springs from a disproportion between what we demand and expect [*fördern und erwarten*], and what we get; but this disproportion is clearly located in our cognition and, given more insight, could be removed completely. (WWR 1, §16, 114–15; SW 2, 104–5).

With this observation, Schopenhauer appears to anticipate a now well-documented psychological phenomenon: The *expectation* of suffering diminishes susceptibility to it.²¹ The same deprivation will cause less pain

²¹ For recent empirical evidence, see L. Y. Atlas *et al.*, "Dissociable Influences of Opiates and Expectations on Pain," *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 32(23), (2012), 8053–64.

if it was expected than if it was unexpected. Modal beliefs about deprivation presumably calibrate expectations: If deprivation is believed to be “unavoidable,” then it could, in the maximal case, elicit “indifference.” Since to desire something implies *not being indifferent* to deprivation of it, such indifference effectively entails that the desire has “died.”

In Stoicism, the inevitability of suffering can be the product of metaphysically contingent circumstances, in which case the absence of it is only “relatively unattainable”: Epictetus was born a slave, and Seneca found himself in service to a mad emperor. By contrast, Schopenhauer has in mind a recognition of the *metaphysical necessity* of suffering, the fact that it is rooted in the very “essence of the things in themselves,” rather than in contingent circumstances of the phenomenal world. In this case, the absence of suffering is “absolutely unattainable”: “He recognizes the whole, comprehends its essence, and finds that it is constantly passing away, caught up in vain strivings, inner conflicts, and perpetual suffering” (WWR 1, §68, 405–6; SW 2, 448). Such an insight would therefore underwrite a *maximal* expectation of suffering, thus reducing the susceptibility to it to a vanishing point. As a consequence, keeping this insight in view would bring about the mortification of the will.

This mechanism of mortification is obviously different from the mechanism put in operation by ascetic deprivation. Deprivation that is *voluntary* cannot prompt an insight into its metaphysical necessity. It can at best be motivated by it. However, ascetic deprivation remains essential to the success of resignation because it is an essentially fragile state, which “must be constantly regained by steady struggle” (WWR 1, §68, 418; SW 2, 462). Ascetic practices may not be necessary to produce resignation, but they are essential for its maintenance, even when it was produced directly by a cognition of the metaphysical necessity of suffering.

This is because this knowledge is hard to keep in view: “Even with people who have approached this point [the relevant knowledge], it is almost always the case that their own tolerable situation, the flattery of the moment, the temptation of hope, and the always recurring chance to satisfy the will, i.e. desire, will be constant obstacles to negating the will and constant temptation to affirming it again” (WWR 1, §68, 419; SW 2, 464). For example, we all readily acknowledge “the necessity of age and death and a host of daily inconveniences,” and yet, contrary to what Schopenhauer maintains, we typically continue to “worry” about them.

He attributes this to a failure somehow to appreciate fully the content of our cognition. To have its “mortifying” effect, the knowledge of the

metaphysical necessity of suffering must become a “living conviction [*lebendige Überzeugung*].” We might suppose that this refers to the contrast Schopenhauer draws between *experiential* and *inferential* knowledge. The negation of the will would thus require the former – “the personal *experience* of suffering – not just the *recognition* of suffering” (WWR I, §68, 419; SW 2, 463). But Schopenhauer insists that both types of acquaintance with suffering are possible “ways” to achieve resignation, so this distinction cannot be what he has in mind. Moreover, both types of acquaintance are equally subject to corruption by “the flattery of the moment, the temptation of hope” (see, respectively, WWR I, §68, 406; SW 2, 448 and WWR I, §68, 419; SW 2, 464).

The problem is not (necessarily) that temporary pleasures and the tenacity of hope cause us to doubt or even to abandon the belief in the necessity of suffering. It is rather that they make it hard to keep it “live” in the forefront of our mind. For example, I may never cease to believe in the inevitability of death, and yet my attention is readily and routinely diverted from it. The “maintenance” function of ascetic practices would be precisely to eliminate these potential sources of distraction: “I do not want to avoid suffering because it can help suppress the will to live (whose appearance is so miserable) by strengthening the recognition that is beginning to stir in me of the true essence of the world, so that this recognition can ultimately become a tranquilizer of my will and redeem me forever” (WWR I, §69, 427; SW 2, 473).

7 The Possibility of Resignation

Considered from the perspective of his metaphysics, Schopenhauer’s doctrine of resignation has been met with skepticism. Here is a representative statement: “Given this view of our nature, it becomes incomprehensible how we could ever possibly suspend our will One can take a break from what one does, but not from what one *is*.”²² In fact, the problem assumes different forms. Schopenhauer explicitly recognizes at least one of them: If the will is the “essence” of life, how can *anything* remain when it is “negated”? He attempts to circumvent it by conceiving of the “negation” of the will as a radical transformation – a “transcendental alteration” – of its essence, rather than a complete annihilation of it (WWR I, §70–71. Cf. WWR I, §68, 421; SW 2, 466; WWR I, 422; SW 2, 467).

²² Soll, “Schopenhauer on the Inevitability of Unhappiness,” 312.

A second problem is that resignation simply appears impossible since it requires breaking from one's very nature. Much depends here on what we understand this nature to be. For example, our nature is "will" for Schopenhauer but the will is free, which opens the possibility of freely willing the negation of the will. And while it appears paradoxical, there is no inherent contradiction in the notion of willing not to will unless perhaps we take it to be the notion that one could stop willing simply by willing to stop. But Schopenhauer rejects this view: The negation of the will is a difficult and protracted process.

A third problem arises out of Schopenhauer's characterization of the will as the basis of all *affective* experience: It underlies not just desires, but also all "inclinations, passions, affects" (WWR 2, chapter 19, 236; SW 3, 252). This might suggest that "will-lessness" entails a loss of the very capacity to *feel*, in which case "the imperturbable peace that accompanies" resignation (WWR 1, §68, 425; SW 2, 471) could only be a kind of apathetic indifference, rather than the "cheerfulness," "joy," or "serenity" in terms of which Schopenhauer describes it. These responses evoke affect and inclination and would thus presuppose that the will has not been fully "negated."²³

All these problems are rooted in specific metaphysical commitments Schopenhauer undertakes. While I cannot resolve them here, I should note that his conception of metaphysics gives us some flexibility. The aim of metaphysics, in his view, is to "decipher" or "interpret" the world as it is given to our experience "(WWR 2, chapter 17, 192; SW 3, 202–3).²⁴ We are initially struck by the inescapability of suffering, the elusiveness of fulfillment, or the peace of resignation, and we wonder what life must be like in itself to present itself in such forms in our experience. To formulate an interpretation, we must avail ourselves of all the phenomenological resources of inner and outer experience, as well as of the experiences of others – for example, as they are recorded in the great works of literature, religion, and philosophy. And the epistemic value of that interpretation is determined by how well it makes sense of that body of experience as a whole.

A striking implication of this approach is that metaphysics is subject to *empirical* confirmation: If a metaphysical commitment impedes our ability

²³ This is a variant of the problem that prompts Janaway in "What's So Good about Negation of the Will?" to suggest that to make sense of Schopenhauer's theory of resignation, we should distinguish between different "kinds of willing," a possible example of the metaphysical amendment I go on to propose.

²⁴ For a good recent discussion of Schopenhauer's method, see Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics*, 60ff.

to make sense of important portions of our experience, then it should be amended. This is presumably the spirit in which Schopenhauer invokes the problematic metaphysical notion of a “transcendental alteration” to make sense of the phenomenon of resignation, a phenomenon that cannot be easily dismissed since it is recorded in several of the world’s great religious and philosophical traditions.

Appreciating Nature Aesthetically in The World as Will and Representation: Between Kant and Hegel

Sandra Shapshay

I Introduction: Unifying Accounts of Schopenhauer's Aesthetic Theory

It is a reasonable scholarly aim to offer a highly unified account of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory. After all, Schopenhauer announces right at the outset of the Preface to the first edition of WWR 1, that the work as a whole aims "to convey a single thought" and that it is "organically coherent" (WWR 1, 5; SW 2, VII). It would be a fallacy – the fallacy of division – to conclude that what is true of the whole is therefore true of one or more of the parts, but it stands to reason that since the text *invites* us to see great organic unity in the system as a whole, each main part of the system should be quite unified as well.

T. J. Diffey, for one, has attempted to offer such a unified, metaphysical account of Schopenhauer's approach to aesthetic appreciation with the following familiar features:

- On the subjective side, aesthetic experience consists in *will-less contemplation* of a natural object, environment, or work of art.
- On the objective side, the correlate of the subject's will-less appreciation is intuitive cognition (*intuitive Erkenntniss/Anschauung*) of a *Platonic Idea*.
- But, according to Diffey, the *ultimate value* of aesthetic experience – with either nature or art – inheres precisely in affording perception of Platonic Ideas.¹

Similarly, Brigitte Scheer offers a unified reading of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, stressing that it is better described as a "*metaphysics* of the beautiful"

¹ T. J. Diffey, "Schopenhauer's Account of Aesthetic Experience," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30:2 (1990), 132–142.

(following the title of chapter 19 of PP 2) and that the primary object (*Hauptgegenstand*) thereof is the Platonic Idea.² She writes, “Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the beautiful makes it clear that the beautiful has no intrinsic aesthetic value in the narrow sense, rather, it has its high significance by allowing the Idea to appear.”³ I take her to mean that *the value* of experiencing beauty is first and foremost *cognitive* on Schopenhauer’s account – that is, it consists in gaining an intuitive understanding of essential features of the world – rather than being primarily imaginative or hedonic. According to Scheer, then, the beautiful in Schopenhauer’s system is nothing but the “visibility of the Idea [*die Schaubarkeit der Idee*].”⁴

Cheryl Foster, by contrast, has drawn out the difficulties in squaring these unified cognitivist accounts with what she calls Schopenhauer’s “subtext on natural beauty,” that is, the high praise of *the sensuous, formal appreciation of “free” natural environments*. For Foster, *the aesthetic experience and value of nature, in particular*, cannot be reduced to the perception of an Idea.⁵ In this chapter, I take my lead from Foster’s suggestion: I shall argue that Schopenhauer’s treatment of natural beauty, in particular, introduces irreducible (but nonetheless virtuous) hybridity into his aesthetic theory.

But before turning to my main argument, I should mention another unifying strategy, pursued by Christopher Janaway in a paper from 1996, which highlights the value that Schopenhauer places on tranquility (*Geistesruhe*).⁶ Janaway foregrounds his case by calling our attention to the following passage in which Schopenhauer *seems* to set out a twofold value of art.⁷ As I hope to show later in this chapter, this passage from

² Brigitte Scheer, “Ästhetik” in *Schopenhauer-Handbuch 2: Auflage*, eds. Daniel Schubbe and Matthias Kößler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2018), 68–80.

³ “Schopenhauers Metaphysik des Schönen lässt deutlich werden, dass das Schöne keinen im engeren Sinn ästhetischen Eigenwert besitzt. Es hat seine hohe Bedeutung vielmehr durch sein Erscheinen-Lassen der Idee,” Scheer, “Ästhetik.” 72 (my translation).

⁴ Paul Guyer also classes Schopenhauer as a cognitivist monist in his important work on the history of aesthetics. See his “Monism and Pluralism in the History of Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71: 2 (2013), 133–143.

⁵ Cheryl Foster, “Schopenhauer’s Subtext on Natural Beauty,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32:1 (1992), 21–32.

⁶ In personal communication, I have learned that Christopher Janaway no longer stands by the view he explicates in this paper. Of course, it is for the reader to determine whether he was right then and wrong now. Regardless of whether his unifying strategy is untenable, I think it is a fruitful interpretation to explore, even if ultimately misguided.

⁷ Christopher Janaway, “Knowledge and Tranquility: Schopenhauer on the Value of Art” in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39–61.

WWR I, section 42 is quite revealing of Schopenhauer's hybrid theory, and so bears quoting at length:

Cognition of the beautiful always posits the pure cognizing subject at the same time as, and inseparably from, the cognition of the Idea as object. And yet the source of aesthetic pleasure will sometimes be located more in the apprehension of the Ideas that are cognized, and sometimes more in the happiness [Seligkeit] and peace of mind [Geistesruhe] of pure cognition that has been liberated from all willing . . . and certainly the preponderance of one or the other component of aesthetic pleasure will depend on whether the intuitively apprehended Idea is a higher or lower level of the objecthood of the will. So with aesthetic contemplation of natural beauty in the inorganic realm, in the vegetable world, or in beautiful works of architecture (either in reality, or through the medium of art), the pleasure of the pure will-less cognition [*der Genuß des reinen willenlosen Erkennens*] will predominate, because the Ideas apprehended here are only the low levels of the objecthood of the will, and thus these appearances do not have any profound meaning or interpretive richness. By contrast, when animals or people are the object of aesthetic contemplation or presentation, the pleasure will consist more in the objective apprehension of these Ideas, which are the clearest manifestations of the will. (WWR I, 237–8; SW 2, 250–251, emphasis added)

Thus, in the appreciation of lower forms of art (e.g., architecture, landscape gardening) and in the enjoyment of natural beauty (especially of plants and inorganic nature), the source of the pleasure, and it seems the *value* of the experience as well, will inhere more in the experience of will-less peace or tranquility rather than in cognitive insight into the Ideas. This is because the Ideas in architecture, landscape gardening, and those generally perceivable in nature are lower grades of objectivation of the meta-physical will. By contrast, the pleasure, and it seems also the *value* that predominates in an experience of, for example, historical painting or drama, is predominantly cognitive, since these art forms make visible the Idea of humanity, a much more complex and complete objectivation of the will. Accordingly, Janaway notes, it seems that the “two components of aesthetic experience, will-less tranquility and knowledge of Ideas, may float free of one another.”⁸

However, Janaway does not rest here, by according two distinct kinds of pleasure as well as two distinct, fundamental aesthetic values in Schopenhauer's system; rather, he too attempts to unify the Schopenhauerian account of aesthetic value, but not by way of the Idea, but rather by way of *tranquility*. The main case Janaway adduces is dramatic tragedy, the extreme cognitive end

⁸ Janaway, “Knowledge and Tranquility,” 47.

of drama, where he holds that the real value of the experience lies not so much in the cognitive insight afforded, but rather in the *spectator's attainment of sublime pleasure*. On this reading, then, the tranquil detachment that a tragic spectator gains by struggle – a detachment akin to resignation – constitutes the ultimate value of this aesthetic experience. It is also the reason why, for Janaway, Schopenhauer puts it at the summit of poetic art. Thus, he concludes,

the truly unifying notion in Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory is that of tranquil, will-less contemplation, a state of non-identification with the striving, suffering, bodily individual that one is. It is this that gives him a single account which assigns value to the arts at both ends of his spectrum of cases – albeit with the one qualification that aesthetic pleasure can be either in the beautiful or the sublime.⁹

In this chapter, I seek to show that neither of these unifying accounts of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory – the cognitive/Idea strategy or the non-cognitive/tranquility strategy – cohere with Schopenhauer's treatment of nature appreciation – what Foster has helpfully summed up as Schopenhauer's "subtext on natural beauty." I shall argue that when one pays close attention to Schopenhauer's account of the appreciation of beautiful and sublime *nature*, there emerges in addition to his well-known hierarchy of art forms another sort of spectrum in his aesthetic theory, which I call the "the spectrum of beauty and sublimity."

This other spectrum not only marks out the value of tranquility as a parallel, irreducible value in Schopenhauer's theory; it tracks something else as well: the importance of sensuous, perceptual form. It is important to note that the criterion for moving up or down this spectrum is importantly different from that of the hierarchy of the arts. On the former, it is the degree of invitingness or hostility *of sensuous form* that moves an object/environment up or down the spectrum; whereas the criterion for moving up or down the hierarchy of art forms is the degree of complexity or simplicity of the Ideas typically made visible in that art form. In what follows, I shall argue that though these two spectra might seem to be inversely correlated (such that the objects of the lowest art form are the most formally inviting, hence the most beautiful; and the objects of the highest art form are the most formally uninviting, hence the most sublime), the degrees along the scales do not correlate neatly, as one would expect from a highly unified theory. The existence of these two distinct,

⁹ Ibid., 58.

orthogonal spectra, then, bespeaks a fundamentally *hybrid, pluralistic* aesthetic theory, or so I shall argue.

2 Schopenhauer on Natural Beauty

Let's look more closely now at what Schopenhauer has to say specifically about the aesthetic experience of nature, the predominant subject of section 34 of WWR I. Here, Schopenhauer writes that a person can, "in exceptional cases," transition from the ordinary (generally instrumental) cognition of things in the world, to aesthetic contemplation of "the natural object that is directly present, a landscape, a tree, a cliff, a building, or whatever it might be" and thus perceive in these things the "Idea, the eternal form, the immediate objecthood of the will at this level" when "cognition tears itself free from the service of the will" and we "lose ourselves" in the "peaceful contemplation" of that ordinary object (WWR I, 200–201; SW 2, 209–210).

At this point in Book III, Schopenhauer is describing the experience of the *beautiful* exclusively (he will tackle the sublime shortly in section 39), and in a similar vein to the passage quoted by Janaway from section 42 (see section 1), he holds (section 38) that the "pleasure" (*das Wohlgefallen*) we gain from "the sight of the beautiful" arises from *both* the cognition of the object as a Platonic Idea and the tranquility of the subject as a "will-less subject of cognition" (WWR I, 219; SW 2, 230). But "in fact [the pleasure derives] sometimes more from the one, and sometimes more from the other, *according to the object of aesthetic contemplation*" (WWR I, 219; SW 2, 230, emphasis added).

On the face of it, the implication of this passage supports the "free-floatingness" idea entertained but not endorsed by Janaway (the notion that the epistemic and hedonic values of aesthetic experience may "float free from one another"). Some objects will be experienced as beautiful and valued largely because of the tranquility they afford, and some will be experienced as beautiful and valued because of the Ideas they make perceptible.¹⁰

By this logic, however, if we were partisans of the cognitive unifying interpretation, we would expect that the beauty of nature would be deficient with respect to the beauty of art, on Schopenhauer's account, insofar as the former offers *mere tranquility* rather than *high cognitive insight*. This is certainly a Hegelian sort of thought, as he denigrates the aesthetic experience

¹⁰ This is the same point that was made in the extended quote in section 1 pertaining to artworks (cited by Janaway in "Knowledge and Tranquility") but applied more particularly to natural objects.

of nature vis-à-vis art for the former's lack of cognitive content, but Schopenhauer (as one might expect) is no Hegelian in this matter. For him, beautiful natural objects and environments seem to have a compensating *advantage* over art – call this the positive pleasure advantage.

To wit, Schopenhauer suggests that some objects really lend themselves to will-less contemplation and tranquility much more than others, and he singles out natural environments, in general and “the plant kingdom in particular” (WWR 1, 225; SW 2, 237) as actually promoting aesthetic contemplation better than any other objects (including, presumably, artworks). Thus, he writes,

Whenever nature suddenly rises to meet our gaze, it almost always succeeds, if only for a few moments, in snatching us away from subjectivity, from our slavery to the will, and transporting us into the state of pure cognition. This also explains why people who are tormented by passions or needs and worries are so suddenly *refreshed, cheered and comforted by a single free glimpse into nature* [*wird . . . durch einen einzigen freien Blick in die Natur so plötzlich erquickt, erheitert, und aufgerichtet*]: the storm of passions, the stress of wishes and fears as well as all the torments of willing are then immediately and miraculously calmed. (WWR 1, 221; SW 2, 232–233, emphasis added).

And he reiterates,

We find this quality [of inviting our transport into an experience of beauty] above all in natural beauty, which gives even the most insensitive people at least a fleeting sense of aesthetic pleasure: in fact, it is striking how the plant kingdom in particular invites us to assume an aesthetic perspective, insists upon it, as it were. (WWR 1, 225; SW 2, 237)

Moreover, in WWR 1, Book IV, Schopenhauer somewhat astoundingly breaks from his univocal view that all pleasure is merely negative – the alleviation of some pain or suffering – and admits that aesthetic experience, and perhaps first and foremost the enjoyment of artistic depictions of natural beauty in poetry constitutes “in point of fact *the only real happiness* that is not preceded by suffering or need or necessarily followed by remorse, suffering, emptiness or weariness.” Unfortunately, “this happiness can fill only isolated moments, not the whole of life” (WWR 1, 347; SW 2, 378, emphasis added). Yet, despite its fleetingness, it is remarkable that here in Book IV and on the strength of the passages quoted above, the *experience of natural beauty per se* seems to constitute an exception to his entire theory of pleasure/happiness as merely negative: In enjoyment of natural beauty (especially from nature itself, but also via artistic representation), it seems, we have true (even if temporary) *positive happiness*.

Further, in WWR 2, Chapter 33, “Isolated Remarks Concerning Natural Beauty,” Schopenhauer adds: “A beautiful view is . . . a catharsis of the spirit [*ein Kathartikon des Geistes*], in the same way that music, according to Aristotle is a catharsis of the feelings, and in its presence we think with the greatest accuracy” (WWR 2, 421; SW 3, 461). But what is it precisely about *natural objects and environments* that enable them to refresh, cheer, and comfort better than any other objects? In other words, why are natural objects and environments – especially the plant world – *more readily experienced as beautiful*?

Schopenhauer’s answer is somewhat difficult to decipher. He writes that it is because natural objects “meet the [aesthetic] state halfway . . . by virtue of their *intricate and at the same time clear and determinate form[s]*” by which they “turn readily into representatives of their Ideas” (WWR 1, 225; SW 2, 236, emphasis added). On the face of it, it seems that it is the (clear, intricate, determinate) sensuous forms of plants, especially, that makes them so inviting. But Schopenhauer also suggests a more ultimate explanation: It is not so much the enjoyment of the sensuous forms of plants *per se* that makes them so inviting, but rather the fact that these forms allow the appreciator to intuit *the Ideas* of these natural objects more readily.

Thus, on the one hand, Schopenhauer’s discussion of the “intricate and at the same time clear and determinate form[s]” of plants, especially, is reminiscent of Kantian formalism: We simply enjoy the graceful, delicate, purposive, “as if designed,” quality of these natural forms. But, on the other hand, he also suggests that these forms are enjoyed insofar as they *facilitate cognition*, enable the objects to “turn readily into representatives of their Ideas.” This latter notion bespeaks an *aesthetics of perfection* (rather than a sensuous formalism), whereby some natural objects (e.g. plants) wear their “Ideas” on their formal sleeves, as it were, and reveal most readily the models/exemplars/Ideas of their species.¹¹

In my view, though Schopenhauer does indeed underscore the notion that “nature has this obliging character, a significance and clarity in its forms that *enables the Ideas individuated in them to address us readily*” (WWR 1, 225; SW 2, 237, emphasis added), ultimately, I think a sensuous formalism is present in the text alongside this aesthetic perfectionism: We human beings simply enjoy graceful, intricate, purposive forms. These are the forms, found in the plant world par excellence.

In order to see the sensuous formalism and aesthetic perfectionism side by side, let’s have a look at a passage in WWR 2, chapter 33, “Isolated Remarks Concerning Natural Beauty,” where Schopenhauer claims that

¹¹ I am indebted to Judith Norman and Rachel Zuckert for pressing me on this point.

the sensuous forms of nature are especially inviting when *free* from human domination:

And how aesthetic nature is! Every completely wild and undeveloped little spot, i.e. one left to be free . . . if only it is kept from human claws, is immediately decorated by nature in the most tasteful manner, clothed in plants, flowers and shrubs whose *unforced essence, natural gracefulness and delightful arrangement* show that they did not grow up under the whipping stick of the great egoist, but that nature freely holds sway. (WWR 2, 421; SW 3, 462, emphasis added)

While the *free* forms of nature enable us to perceive more readily “the objectivation of the still non-cognizant will to life, which unfolds itself here with the greatest naivety” (WWR 2, 421; SW 3, 462) – supporting the perfectionist reading – Schopenhauer also describes the forms of the plants themselves as “tasteful,” “graceful,” and in a “delightful arrangement,” which bespeaks a sensuous formalism.

Another passage that supports the presence of sensuous formalism in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics is in his supplementary discussion of painting in WWR 2, chapter 36. Here, in addition to the “true goal of painting, and art in general” which is “to facilitate our grasp of the (Platonic) Ideas of the essence of the world,” Schopenhauer admits that there is another sort of “independent beauty” in painting that “has nothing to do with . . . [the grasp of the Ideas] and which is produced by the simple harmony of colors, the agreeable arrangements of figures, the favorable distribution of light and shade, as well as the tone of the entire picture” (WWR 2, 439; SW 481–482). This “independent beauty” seems precisely to be *sensuous, formal beauty*, and it “promotes the state of pure cognition and is to painting what diction, meter, and rhyme are to poetry.” While Schopenhauer calls this other type of beauty “subordinate” to the beauty of perceiving Ideas, he says that it is “what has the first and immediate effect” on the viewer (WWR 2, 439; SW 3, 482).

To my mind, the implication of this discussion is that Schopenhauer is offering up another spectrum of value in addition to his well-known hierarchy of the arts spectrum. I call this the spectrum of beauty and sublimity, whereby some objects, specifically plants with pronounced formal aesthetic qualities – for example, a graceful leafy vine or an intricate flower – have a higher degree of beauty than others, such as an ordinary artifact like a table, chair, or house, by virtue of the natural object’s *free, sensuous form*. These determinate, intricate, graceful, tasteful sensuous forms make the natural objects that have them especially beautiful.

Schopenhauer’s talk of the “intricate and at the same time clear and determinate form[s]” of plants, especially, is likely going to ring some

Kantian bells, as it is reminiscent of the “Analytic of the Beautiful.” Accordingly, one might think that Schopenhauer’s discussion of the importance of sensuous form to an object’s invitingness to contemplation, and thus to its degree of beauty, is some kind of careless relic from Schopenhauer’s study of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, a Kantian holdover (or hangover perhaps!) which really has no place in his wider aesthetic theory. But this is not the case, because Schopenhauer employs this same logic – namely, the more inviting the sensuous form, the higher the degree of beauty – quite systematically in his discussion of the sublime.

After explicitly following Kant in distinguishing between mathematically and dynamically sublime objects/environments, Schopenhauer adds his own distinctive twist to the discussion: *degrees* of sublimity. In a manner parallel to his treatment of natural beauty, it turns out that the rung on which an environment falls on the spectrum of the sublime depends on the “significant forms” of that environment. In the case of the sublime – paradigmatically in nature – an environment’s sublimity is based on how *hostile or uninviting* that form is (whereas, with the beautiful in nature, the criterion was precisely the opposite, namely, the *invitingness* of sensuous forms). Thus, Schopenhauer writes that an object or environment is more or less sublime insofar as its “significant forms” bear a more or less “hostile relation to the human will in general” and the more or less they threaten the human being’s bodily existence “with a superior power that suppresses all resistance” or threatens the human being’s sense of significance by “reducing [the person] to nothing with its immense size” (WWR 1, 225; SW 2, 237). Precisely because the “significant forms” of these natural environments/phenomena are the opposite of inviting to aesthetic contemplation, they are sublime rather than beautiful. And the more hostile the forms, the more sublime they are.

What results from Schopenhauer’s discussion of beautiful and sublime natural objects, then, is a hierarchical *spectrum of beauty and sublimity* that varies according to the degree of obligingness or threateningness – to aesthetic contemplation – that is inherent in the form of the object or environment. We may schematize this spectrum as in Figure 3.1:

The reason why I schematize this as a vertical, hierarchical spectrum with beauty at the top is because I understand Schopenhauer to be positing tranquility as an important, irreducible value of aesthetic experience in its own right.¹² Accordingly, plants, whose sensuous, free, natural forms enable the transition into refreshing will-lessness most readily, are at the top; the natural “forms” – for example, a turbulent, stormy sea – which most *resist* the

¹² I am indebted to Chris Janaway for pressing me on this point.

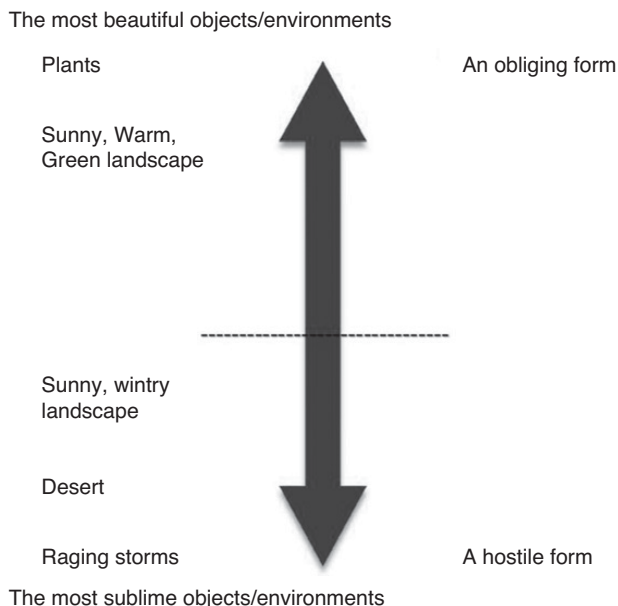


Figure 3.1 Spectrum 1: Beauty and sublimity

transition into will-less contemplation by virtue of their hostile, overwhelming forms (or better “formlessness,” as it were), are at the bottom of this spectrum. The tranquility that one achieves in sublime experience is hard won – for the “feeling of the sublime is distinct from the feeling of the beautiful only by virtue of an additional element, namely, an elevation [of the intellect] above the relationship – recognized as hostile – between the object contemplated and the will in general” (WWR 1, 227; SW 2, 239). Furthermore, this aesthetic elevation is precarious, that is, it must be maintained through active effort. For the sublime, one must “put in the work” for the experience to remain genuinely aesthetic, and thus the sublime lies at the bottom of this spectrum – it is not very tranquil; whereas the tranquility that one enjoys in an experience of beautiful, free nature is one of almost effortless refreshment, cheer, and comfort, and puts it at the top.

I should stress that there is another dimension of aesthetic experience tracked by this spectrum: the *intensity* of the experience.¹³ The highest intensity of the experience of beauty and sublimity respectively are to be

¹³ Thanks to James Messina and Alex Neill for prompting me to discuss this further dimension of intensity.

found at opposite ends of the spectrum. At the top of the beauty end, it seems that the experience of inviting natural places is *intensely cheering and refreshing*, it is a “catharsis of the spirit” in which “the storm of passions, the stress of wishes and fears as well as all the torments of willing are then immediately and *miraculously* calmed.” (WWR 1, 221; SW 2, 232–233, emphasis added). At the extreme sublime end, it seems that the experience of very uninviting natural places makes for the most intensely sublime experiences due to the greater elevation required of the subject over the recognized hostile object/environment, in order to achieve some measure of tranquil aesthetic contemplation over it. Accordingly, Schopenhauer writes, “[s]everal different degrees of sublimity are thus apparent depending on whether this additional element [the elevation over the threat] is strong, loud, urgent, close, or only weak, distant, merely intimated – in fact, this is the origin of the transition from the beautiful to the sublime” (WWR 1, 227; SW 2, 239).

3 The Spectrum of Beauty and Sublimity vs. the Hierarchy of the Arts

When Schopenhauer turns squarely to a discussion of the arts in sections 42–52 of WWR 1, we get a rather different spectrum from the one I have schematized above. Here, an art form is higher on the scale when the Ideas that the art form paradigmatically enables us to perceive are higher objectifications of the will. Thus, at the top of the hierarchy of the arts (save music, which is strictly speaking off the hierarchy altogether since, for Schopenhauer, it bypasses the Ideas and expresses or “copies” the will directly) is tragic drama because it portrays the Idea of humanity – the most complex and thus highest objectification of the will – in its most objective light (see Figure 3.2).

The hierarchy of art forms has everything to do with the level of the Ideas (paradigmatically) made visible within the various arts, and thus the *importance of the knowledge on offer*, whereas the spectrum of beauty and sublimity has everything to do with the invitingness or hostility of sensuous form, and thus the *intensity of the tranquility on offer*. The key value of the spectrum of the arts, then, is knowledge, and the degree of knowledge on the spectrum correlates to the degree of objectivation of the Will in the Ideas paradigmatically presented in a given art form. The key value of the spectrum of beauty and sublimity, by contrast, is the value of tranquility, and the degree or intensity of tranquility corresponds to the degree of invitingness of the sensuous form.

The natural question to ask now is: *Are these two scales ultimately correlated in some way?* If they are tightly correlated, perhaps there really

The art form rises as paradigmatic Ideas presented in that art form increase in complexity qua objectifications of the will

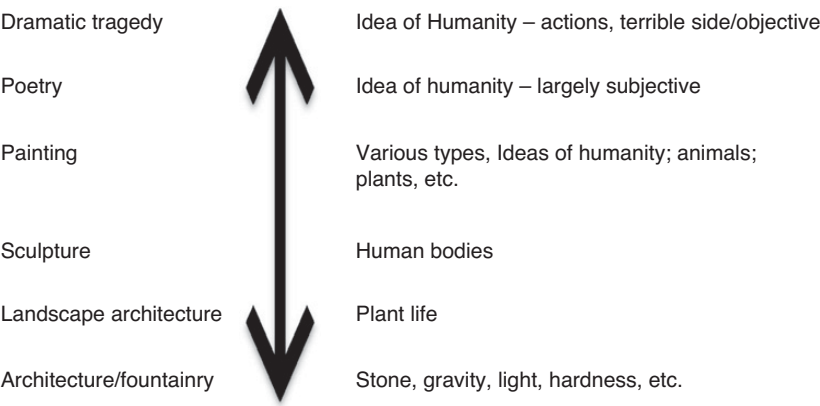


Figure 3.2 Spectrum 2: The hierarchy of art forms

is some unifying factor in this theory, but if they are not, perhaps the sort of pleasure or value one derives predominantly from an aesthetic appreciation of nature and the pleasure or value one derives predominantly from an aesthetic appreciation of higher works of art do indeed, in Janaway’s terms, “float free of one another.”

In order to investigate whether there is a correlation between these two spectra, it is helpful to recall that Schopenhauer holds that in some cases of aesthetic appreciation of art, the pleasure will come more from tranquility and, in other cases, more from the perception of Ideas. So, perhaps the scale of beauty and sublimity (Figure 3.1) inversely tracks the cases where pleasure from art comes most from tranquility (in Figure 3.3, see the dotted arrow below from architecture to the top of the beauty scale) and where pleasure will come most from the perception of Ideas (in Figure 3.3, see the dotted arrow from tragedy to the sublime end of the scale). If these scales were neatly, inversely correlated, we would expect that the *highest art form* would be the most sublime and the *lowest art form* would be the most beautiful, and so on, with the intermediate art forms on the spectrum as in Figure 3.3:

Now, to some extent, this inverse correlation does hold, for Schopenhauer claims that the summit of poetic art – dramatic tragedy – affords the highest degree of dynamically sublime experience (WWR 2, 450; SW 3, 495), while the lowest art forms on the hierarchy, architecture and artistic fountainry, are

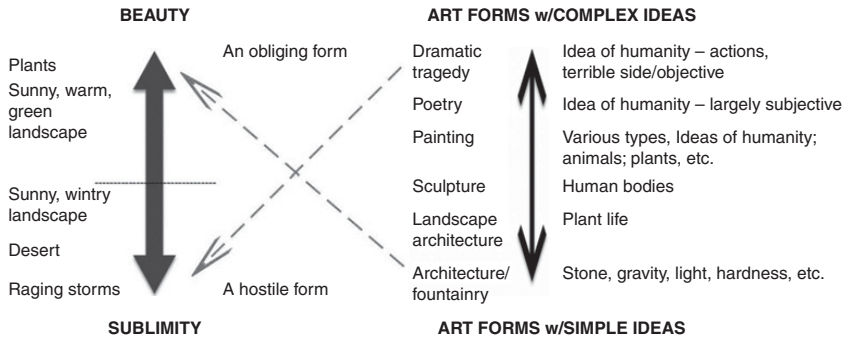


Figure 3.3 An inverse correlation between these spectra?

much more liable to afford the feeling of beauty rather than sublimity. Also, recall that Schopenhauer did mention “a building” among the “natural objects” whose determinate and clear sensuous forms seem to lend themselves most easily to aesthetic contemplation.

However, any neat, inverse correlation between these two spectra starts to break down when one looks carefully at what lies at the top of the beautiful scale. *Plants* are really the most beautiful natural objects for Schopenhauer, by virtue of their determinate and intricate forms, but Ideas of the plant kingdom are *not* the paradigmatic Ideas presented in the lowest art form, architecture. The Ideas that architecture brings into intuition are “gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness, these universal qualities of stone . . . and then, alongside these, light” (WWR I, 239; SW 2, 252). One must move up the scale of the arts from architecture (and its partner, artistic fountainry) to landscape gardening, in order to render intuitable the Ideas of “vegetable nature” (WWR I, 44, 243; SW 2, 257). Therefore, if there really were a neat inverse correlation between these two spectra, landscape gardening (not architecture) should be the lowest art form because plants are the objects most readily experienced as beautiful. But Schopenhauer does not put these at the bottom of his hierarchy of the arts.

In fact, the situation is even worse for such a neat, inverse correlation of the two spectra because Schopenhauer thinks that *landscape painting* is the art form that reveals, par excellence, the Ideas of vegetable nature *in artistic form*. Since plants offer themselves up so freely to aesthetic contemplation “without the intervention of art,” landscape gardening – especially of the English kind – really just showcases the autonomous natural beauty of plants, and for that reason is less a properly *artistic* display of Ideas in the plant world (see WWR I, §44). But following this logic, it seems that landscape painting –

qua form of art which represents artistically the most beautiful objects in Figure 3.1 – might more properly be ranked as the lowest art form in Figure 3.2 but it clearly does not occupy this position in Schopenhauer's hierarchy of art forms; rather, it occupies a place in the middle of the hierarchy.

Yet, one might object to my throwing a wrench into any inverse correlation here, by underscoring that Schopenhauer *does* hold that the pleasure involved in works like still life (paintings more akin to landscape painting) is derived almost entirely from tranquility:

With still lifes and paintings of unadorned architecture, ruins, church interiors and the like, the subjective side of aesthetic pleasure predominates: that is to say, our delight in them does not lie primarily in the immediate apprehension of the Ideas presented, but rather more in the subjective correlate of this apprehension, in pure cognition free of the will; since the painter allows us to see things through his eyes. (WWR 1, 244; SW 2, 258)

Accordingly, even though painting is a higher art form than landscape architecture, this does not by itself mean that objective rather than subjective pleasure would predominate in landscape painting per se. Schopenhauer actually specifies that in landscape painting the objective and subjective sides of aesthetic experience are balanced (WWR 1, 244; SW 2, 258). But the crucial value of still lifes, paintings of ruins, landscape paintings and the like, for Schopenhauer, is the way the works enable us to see the world through the tranquil eyes and mind of the painter. From my previous analysis, however, it stands to reason that the painter's tranquil vision of the world is *itself largely due to the obligingness of the (predominantly) natural, sensuous forms in the items represented*, forms which also meet the painterly gaze halfway.

Ultimately, I hope that this discussion of the *mismatches* between the two spectra reveals that while there may some *loose correlations* between art forms that portray lower Ideas (low degrees of cognitive value in Figure 3.2) and the appreciation of sensuous forms which lend themselves to aesthetic contemplation (high degrees of beauty in Figure 3.1), there is not the kind of *tight coordination between these two scales that one would expect from a highly unified aesthetic theory*.

In order to illustrate the presence of these two spectra in Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory, and to suggest that the hybridity in his aesthetic theory is a strength, I will utilize two artistic examples – *Dedham Vale*, a landscape painting by John Constable, and a genre painting, *The Cardplayers*, by Jan Steen. I should note at the outset, however, that it might seem odd to use an *artistic* example – the Constable landscape painting – to discuss the place of natural beauty in Schopenhauer's aesthetics. One might worry that an artistic depiction of natural beauty will afford tranquility not because we are looking at



Figure 3.4 John Constable, *Dedham Vale* (1802).
(Victoria and Albert Museum, Photo Credit: Image by Archivart / Alamy Stock Photo.)

nature, but rather at a painting, and the pictorial composition (which is reliant on artistic choice) is a pleasing one. And indeed, as quoted in section 2, Schopenhauer does refer to an “independent beauty” in art that is dependent on sensuous formal aspects such as composition.

Yet, while it is true that the artistic representation of nature in Constable’s *Dedham Vale* (see Figure 3.4) frames this natural environment and imports the

artist's own choices in doing so, thus importing another sort of beauty into the work than perception of Ideas, Schopenhauer holds that the key function of such a painting is that it *communicates the artist's properly objective aesthetic experience of the place*. That is to say, such a landscape painting enables us to share the painter's own tranquil experience of the environment as well as the perception of Ideas made visible in it. The artist merely helps the ordinary person, who "finishes with everything so quickly, with artworks, with beautiful objects in nature" (WWR I, 211; SW 2, 221) by taking the time to observe, to cognize the essential, and then "to repeat what he has thus cognized in an intentional work" (WWR I, 218; SW 2, 229). Yet Schopenhauer underscores that: "the nature of aesthetic pleasure is the same whether it is called forth by a work of art or directly through the intuition of nature and life. The artwork merely facilitates the kind of cognition in which the pleasure consists" (WWR I, 218; SW 2, 229). Ultimately, then, for Schopenhauer the main task of an artist like Constable is to communicate to spectators an aesthetic experience they could, in principle, have had on their own with the actual Dedham Vale, if those spectators had had enough patience to become similarly absorbed by the environment in order tranquilly to perceive the Ideas therein.¹⁴

With this idea of artistic communication as essentially *facilitation* for the ordinary spectator *of a tranquil, cognitively rich aesthetic perception of the world* in mind, recall Schopenhauer's claim that the pleasure taken in "genuine landscape painting" is about 50/50 from the subjective and objective sides (WWR I, 244; SW 2, 258). That is to say, on Schopenhauer's account, there is about an equal mixture of pleasure deriving from (a) the subjective experience of tranquility in viewing these natural forms – somewhat transparently through the eyes of the artist – and (b) from the pleasure of the cognitive perception of Ideas, again, communicated somewhat transparently through the eyes of the artist. The pleasure from the cognition of Ideas is fairly low because the painting portrays trees, shrubbery, a stream, a building in the distance – rather low Ideas on the hierarchy of the arts scale – and "thus these appearances do not have any profound meaning or interpretive richness" (WWR I, 237; SW 2, 251).

Yet, despite its lack of "interpretive richness," this painting is very beautiful insofar as the largely free, natural forms of the landscape depicted in the work really *invite contemplation*. The formal choices by the artist (its composition, "the simple harmony of colors," "the favorable distribution of light and shade," etc. [WWR 2, 439; SW 3, 481–482]) further add to the sensuous

¹⁴ This view of art stresses the objectivity of the artist and his/her role as a communicator of an objective, intuitive vision of the world; it certainly downplays the (merely) subjective, expressivist potential of artists to communicate how they see and feel about the world, insofar as these perspectives are not aimed at getting at the essential features of the world itself.



Figure 3.5 Jan Havicksz Steen (Dutch 1626–1679), *An Elegant Company Playing Cards*. (Courtesy of Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo).

beauty of the painting. But the subject matter of this painting – this vista consisting largely of trees, shrubs, and other plants – really *invited the tranquil contemplation of the artist*, and now Constable communicates this pleasurable state to the viewer. The implication of these two spectra is that the pleasure in the appreciation derives largely from the beauty of sensuous natural forms and the will-lessness that these facilitate, but that the painting is not the worse for that – it is still a very beautiful, hedonically valuable painting, even affording that exceptional “real happiness” that is neither preceded nor followed by need and suffering (WWR 1, 347; SW 2, 378).

By contrast, consider a genre painting such as the one in Figure 3.5 by Jan Steen. In this painting, there is not an abundance of sensuous, natural forms to invite one into aesthetic contemplation – they are only present here in the landscape painting that is “pictorially mentioned” (in Arthur Danto’s terms¹⁵) and hangs over the fireplace, but is certainly not the focus of this painting. Rather, Steen invites us to interpret the action and significance of this scene of somewhat ordinary Dutch people circa 1660. If we do engage

¹⁵ Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 11.

with the painting aesthetically, putting our other concerns on hold for the time being to interpret it, we see that the young woman looking at us is in league with the wine-purveying man, and possibly also the red-bereted man, in order to hustle the well-dressed young man out of his money in a card game. Studying the painting further, we see in a fairly distant room, a couple engaging in lascivious activity – he is perhaps a soldier given that his sword seems to hang on the back chair occupied by the young woman in the foreground – and, presumably, the soldier’s dog is taking a nap, rather than alerting him to the fact that there are a bunch of hustlers in this establishment.¹⁶ The pleasure in appreciating this painting derives much more from the “interpretive richness” and from the cognitive insight gained into the Idea of humanity by way of the artist’s illuminating depiction of morally suspect yet comical all-too-human actions and characters.

By juxtaposing these works of art, as well as the kinds of aesthetic experiences Schopenhauer would see us as typically having with them, we illustrate Schopenhauer’s claim that there are different proportions of subjective vs. objective pleasure involved in aesthetic appreciation in general. Notwithstanding these different proportions of subjective and objective pleasure and the values associated with them (hedonic and cognitive, respectively), Schopenhauer refers to both sorts of pleasure as *pleasure in the beautiful*. Both paintings are valuable as sources of beauty, but their beauty seems to take distinctly different forms. In the Constable landscape, we appreciate the *beauty of sensuous form (paradigmatically of nature)* and in the Steen we appreciate *the beauty of insightful content (paradigmatically in higher forms of art)*. Neither of these types of beauty seems to be reducible to the other – both are highly valuable.

I would like to suggest, then, that the upshot of these artistic examples is that the best way to interpret the presence of these different spectra in Schopenhauer’s aesthetics – the spectrum of beauty and sublimity, on the one hand, and the spectrum of art forms, on the other – is to see them as *orthogonal* to each other because they are scales of *different kinds of aesthetic value*: the beauty/sublimity of sensuous form and beauty/sublimity of Ideas.¹⁷ And corresponding to these two distinct scales are two distinct values of aesthetic experience: tranquility and knowledge, respectively, neither of which is reducible to the other.

¹⁶ For a wonderful set of lectures about Dutch painting and specifically about this painting (lecture 2) by art historian and former Director of the Getty Museum, John Walsh, see Yale University Art Gallery’s online series at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3kRldCWVWs.

¹⁷ Sublime content would seem to be Ideas that are difficult because threatening or awful. Tragic drama would be the epitome of sublime content.

In sum, my proposal is to interpret Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory as a *hybrid theory* that prizes, especially, two distinctive sorts of aesthetic value: the tranquil beauty/sublimity of sensuous form and the interpretive beauty/sublimity of content. By contrast, if the *unified, tranquility interpretation* of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory were correct, we would not expect the criterion that moves an art form up the hierarchy of the arts to be based on the complexity of the Ideas portrayed in an art form; rather, we would expect that the criterion would be *the ability to afford tranquility*. But if that were the case, landscape gardening, still life painting, and paintings of ruins, unadorned architecture and the like should be at the top of the hierarchy, not dramatic tragedy. Yet, dramatic tragedy is at the top, it seems, because it gives the most objective and fullest picture of the highest Idea, the Idea of humanity. So it seems that the complexity of the Idea – not the affordance of tranquility, which is decidedly *not* tragedy's forte – is *precisely* what this particular scale is based upon.

Furthermore, if the unified, cognitive/Idea interpretation of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory were correct, this would, by implication, favor *art* over nature given the role of the genius in distilling and representing more clearly Ideas from nature and life in a work of art. But Schopenhauer never explicitly favors art over nature in his aesthetic theory (as does, for example, Hegel),¹⁸ for while art forms are certainly capable of portraying higher rungs on the Ideas spectrum than can nature, the latter is better poised to attain the highest rungs on the beauty/sublimity spectrum. Accordingly, while art does enjoy some *cognitive* advantages over nature for Schopenhauer – in that it affords greater knowledge of the human condition – beautiful nature seems to have compensating *hedonic* advantages over art insofar as “the richness of beautiful nature [*die Fülle der schönen Natur*]” more readily affords the suffering person the refreshment, cheer, and comfort of aesthetic tranquility.

4 Implications of This Hybrid Aesthetic Theory

It might seem that a hybrid aesthetic theory is, for its hybridity, undesirable. But I think it would be a mistake to see such hybridity as a theoretical defect. Rather, I think it is a sign that Schopenhauer was keenly alive to and

¹⁸ Alfred Schmidt makes the same point regarding Schopenhauer vs. Hegel in his “Wesen, Ort und Funktion der Kunst in der Philosophie Schopenhauers” in *Schopenhauer und die Künste*, eds. Günther Baum and Dieter Birnbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 26: “Während Hegels Ästhetik Naturschönes nur als ‘Reflex des dem Geiste angehörigen Schönen’ gelten lässt, orientiert sich Schopenhauers Betrachtung des Schönen gleichermaßen an der Natur wie an der Kunst, ohne sie zu trennen oder diese über jene zu stellen.”

honest about the richness of aesthetic phenomena. As sketched in section 3, I believe Schopenhauer's theory does a good job of tracking the different sorts of value on offer in the Constable landscape and the Steen genre painting, respectively.

Further, when interpreted in the hybrid way I am suggesting, Schopenhauer's theory occupies a unique place between Kant and Hegel in the history of aesthetics. On the one hand, *Kant privileges the aesthetic appreciation of nature* (over art) in several ways:

- (1) aesthetic experience of nature affords a greater purity of aesthetic judgments¹⁹
- (2) appreciation of nature (rather than art) is the mark of a morally good soul²⁰
- (3) it seems that nature (rather than art) can be experienced as sublime (although Kant does give us some artistic examples of sublimity, which certainly complicates this view).²¹

¹⁹ In section 16 of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, for instance, where he distinguishes free from adherent beauty, the examples he gives of the former – which admit of truly pure judgments of taste as opposed to the adherent judgments whose purity is marred by their conceptuality – are natural objects such as flowers, birds, marine crustaceans, and foliage, although he does also mention artistic products such as “designs à la grecque” and “music fantasias.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114; Ak. 5, 229. Further, the title of section 45 on beautiful/fine art is “Beautiful Art Is an Art to the Extent That It Seems at the Same Time to Be Nature,” 185; Ak. 5, 306.

²⁰ See section 41 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, “On the Intellectual Interest in the Beautiful,” 178; Ak. 5, 298–299, see also 179; Ak. 5, 299–300.

²¹ On the one hand, Kant clearly dismisses artistic sublimity and asserts that pure judgments of the sublime can only be had in the context of and with respect to “raw nature”:

[I]f the aesthetic judgment is to be pure . . . and if an example of that is to be given which is fully appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, then the sublime must not be shown in products of art (e.g. buildings, columns, etc.) where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude, nor in natural things whose concept already brings with it a determinate end (e.g., animals of a known natural determination), but rather in *raw nature*. (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, section 26, 136; Ak. 5, 252–253; emphasis added)

But on the other hand, Kant gives *artistic examples* of objects that prompt a sublime response; for example, St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome and the Egyptian pyramids (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, section 26, 136; Ak. 5, 252). This textual ambivalence has given rise to a lively debate among Kant scholars as to whether Kantian aesthetics should make a place for pure artistic sublimity or whether Kant's apparent dismissal of it is justified. See Uygur Abaci, “Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66 (2008): 237–251 and “Artistic Sublime Revisited: Reply to Robert Clewis” *JAAC* 68:2 (2010), 170–173; Robert Wicks, “Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53:2 (1995), 189–193; Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and Robert Clewis, “A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68:2 (2010), 167–170. I tend to agree with Uygur Abaci's interpretation of Kant on this issue which he sums up as follows: “[a]lthough there may be various senses in which sublimity can be attributed to works of art [in Kant], none of these attributions can be understood as genuine instances of a judgment of sublimity.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, *Hegel privileges the aesthetic appreciation of art*, and dismisses the aesthetic appreciation of nature pretty much wholesale. In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (from the 1820s), for instance, he writes that

The present course of lectures deals with “Aesthetic.” Their subject is the wide *realm of the beautiful*, and, more particularly, their province is Art . . . we at once exclude the *beauty of Nature*. Such a limitation of our subject may appear to be an arbitrary demarcation . . . But this is not the sense in which we are to understand the limitation of the Aesthetic to *the beauty of art*. . . . artistic beauty stands *higher* than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born – born again, that is – of the mind.²²

For Hegel, it is art, not nature, that is born of the Spirit [*Geist*], and thus can reveal Spirit; this is why the differences between the appreciation of art and nature are so sharp that the latter actually falls entirely outside the realm of philosophical aesthetics.

My argument has aimed to support seeing Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory as a hybrid one, with two spectra of aesthetic value: the affordance of tranquility via sensuous form (and par excellence in the plant world), and the affordance of knowledge via presentation of the Ideas (and par excellence via poetry). If this has been successful, I believe I have shown how, in Book III of WWR 1, Schopenhauer gives us a middle way between Kant and Hegel. He offers *an aesthetic theory that neither privileges nor disparages the aesthetic appreciation of nature*; nature and art both afford valuable aesthetic experiences that are paradigmatically valuable in different ways, but which, it seems, are equally important.

But there is a *prima facie* problem for the *systematic* place of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics when interpreted in this hybrid manner. Highlighting the importance of this sensuous, formal beauty raises another tension brought out by Robert Wicks, namely, that this kind of appreciation has traditionally been allied with a kind of theological optimism (present even in Kant) which *prima facie* conflicts with Schopenhauer’s favored pessimism.²³ Thus, there may be a problematic, lurking optimism

[This is because it is the broader context of judgments of sublimity], that is, nature, which gives the experience of the sublime its distinctive character” (Abaci, “Kant’s Justified Dismissal,” 237–239).

²² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, 2004), chapter 1, 3–4.

²³ Robert Wicks, “Natural Beauty and Optimism in Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 16:2 (2008): 273–291.

implicated, especially in Schopenhauer's treatment of natural beauty; hence, one suspects, a reason why it has hitherto remained, in Foster's terms, "a subtext."

5 Does Natural Beauty Bespeak a Purposive World?

In a roundabout way, I'd like to suggest that Schopenhauer may have been aware of the lurking optimism in the beauty of sensuous natural forms, and thus consciously or unconsciously suppressed a frank discussion thereof. My evidence for this is that there is something very puzzling about Schopenhauer's framing of §40 of WWR I on the "stimulating [das Reizende]."²⁴ He introduces this section by saying that "[b]ecause opposites shed light on each other, we should perhaps remark here that the true opposite of the sublime will certainly not be recognized as such at first glance: it is the stimulating" (WWR I, 232; SW 2, 244–245). Schopenhauer's reasoning for this relies on a spatial metaphor: in a sublime response the subject has to struggle to "rise above" the will and its interests, whereas the stimulating "by contrast drags the viewer down from the pure contemplation" (WWR I, 232; SW 2, 245) by necessarily stimulating the person's will.

On its face, "rising above [sich erheben]" the pressures of the will in the sublime (das Erhabene) does seem to be the opposite of being "dragged down [zieht herab]" from aesthetic contemplation by the stimulation of the will by "das Reizende." However, I think a strong case can be made that the stimulating (both in its positive and negative valences, e.g. a delicious-looking oyster in a still life or a disgusting, rotting corpse) is the true opposite of *both the beautiful and the sublime*, not just the sublime, for the *stimulating is anti-aesthetic in general*, and the beautiful and the sublime are *both* varieties of (will-less) aesthetic experience.

The true opposite of the sublime per se, then, seems not to be the stimulating, but is rather the beautiful, and the major difference between the beautiful and the sublime has, as I have argued above, everything to do with the nature of the *sensuous form* of the object or environment. The former are inviting, intricate, clear, and determinate (dare I say in a Kantian vein "purposive [zweckmäßig]" for our faculties) and the latter are hostile and overwhelming (again the Kantian term "contrapurposive [widerzweckmäßig]" seems apt here).

It seems, then, that by drawing attention to the stimulating as the (supposed) opposite of the sublime per se, Schopenhauer (consciously or

²⁴ Alex Neill made the oddness of this section salient to me.

unconsciously) is offering us a red herring. He is drawing attention away from the major distinction between the sublime and the beautiful insofar as the sensuous forms of the former are “contrapurposive” or “hostile” for aesthetic contemplation and the latter are “purposive” or “inviting” of aesthetic contemplation. Why would he do this?

Recall that the inviting forms of nature which beckon aesthetic pleasure were the jumping-off point in Kant’s aesthetic theory for some speculation on the ultimately morally purposive nature of the world as a whole. Kant’s privileging of the aesthetic appreciation of nature is bound up with his *teleo-theological* concerns in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, insofar as pure judgments of beauty – as well as the moral agency they symbolize in §59, “Beauty as a Symbol of Morality” – afford us some grounds for rational hope that the natural world is purposive for us and will not ultimately frustrate our moral ends.²⁵ In a similar vein, Hegel’s privileging of art appreciation is bound up with his belief that human beings will/must create a better, more rational, social world – a “second nature” out of the spiritless natural world – in the course of history. Thus, Kant aligns natural beauty with rational hope that the highest good of the world will be realized; and Hegel aligns artistic beauty with rational hope that the highest social good will be realized in the world in the fullness of time.

What, if anything, does the rough parity between the values of art and nature appreciation mean for the place of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics within his philosophy as a whole? In particular, does the hedonic value of appreciating the inviting, sensuous forms of nature, as Wicks suggests – in Schopenhauer’s terms, the cheer, refreshment, and comfort of aesthetic contemplation of nature – stand in tension with his pessimism?

Although I cannot do justice to these questions here, I would like to suggest that the aesthetic appreciation of nature and art does indeed connect to larger systematic concerns in Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Aesthetic contemplation offers a standpoint from which one can enjoy a tolerably good life, and so this does sit in tension with the most radically pessimistic remarks of WWR I, Book IV.²⁶ The beautiful forms of nature par excellence provide valuable cheer and refreshment, a “catharsis of the

²⁵ Dieter Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

²⁶ For an argument that Schopenhauer was a rather conflicted pessimist, and that there are actually “two Schopenhauers” – what I call the “Knight with Hope” and the “Knight of Despair” – see Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics: Hope, Compassion and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). For another way to dispute the importance of pessimism in Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a whole, which stresses the importance Schopenhauer placed on scientific knowledge both for relieving suffering and providing the scientist with a pretty rewarding

spirit" (WWR 2, 421; SW 3, 461); nature and art do provide valuable insight into the essential features of the world. Moreover, Schopenhauer seems to follow Aristotle in the *Poetics*, by acknowledging that it is a great pleasure to *learn* about the world – hence there is pleasure in the cognition of Ideas not just in the enjoyment of will-lessness (though admittedly some truths, say, the truths of dramatic tragedy, may be quite depressing); and so, even if one may not remain in the aesthetic state permanently, the aesthetic state is unique in Schopenhauer's thought in providing "real happiness" (WWR 1, 347; SW 2, 378). Thus, on the face of it, it certainly would seem a reasonable eudaimonic strategy to try to maximize one's aesthetic experiences in life, rather than resign from life altogether (enter Nietzsche).

But in contrast to Kant and Hegel, Schopenhauer does not hold that aesthetic appreciation of nature or art gives us actual grounds for optimism that the world is fundamentally purposive for our human strivings (moral or otherwise). As I sketched above with respect to WWR 1, §40 on "the Stimulating," it seems that Schopenhauer either consciously or unconsciously was seeking to avoid a discussion of the "purposive" vs. the "contrapurposive" forms of nature, by claiming that the opposite of the sublime is the stimulating rather than the beautiful.²⁷

Notwithstanding, Schopenhauer does recognize that the sensuous forms of nature (especially in the plant world) invite aesthetic will-lessness and are capable of affording great refreshment and cheer. The upshot of the values of aesthetic experience – tranquility and knowledge – that come paradigmatically from nature and art respectively, is that human beings can take a standpoint on the world that will bring us understanding, pleasure, "real happiness," and even, dare I say (as in the case of music) a kind of intellectual joy.²⁸ Human beings can also preserve and cultivate beautiful and sublime environments, and the talented among us can create beautiful

way of life, see Marco Segala, "Metaphysics and the Sciences in Schopenhauer" in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. Sandra Shapshay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 151–175.

²⁷ Another relevant point here is that Schopenhauer shows no evidence of believing the Kantian-style *explanation* for beauty that underwrites the quasi-teleology in the harmony between nature and our cognitive faculties. Thanks to Alistair Welchman for making this point salient to me.

²⁸ Judith Norman makes this point rather compellingly in "Music and Pessimism" in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. Sandra Shapshay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 197–212. Norman writes, "Music is an exceptional art in several ways: First, the pleasure that it affords the listener appears to be something more substantial than the merely negative release from pain provided by the aesthetic experience of the other fine arts" and that "intense satisfaction we (our intellects) experience in listening to music is in part derived from our musical knowledge that the will is metaphysically whole and complete," 208. Thus, for Norman, it is positive pleasure consisting of a "vertical" sense of metaphysical wholeness and completeness that coexists with the "horizontal" endless striving of human willing and endeavors.

and sublime artworks to add to the beauty and sublimity of the natural world. But, in respect of Schopenhauer, unlike Kant and Hegel, we should not be tempted to interpret aesthetic appreciation of nature or art – nor artistic creation – as revealing a built-in purposive structure to the world. Aesthetic contemplation of nature and art, and aesthetic creativity, in Schopenhauer's philosophical system, is *nothing more nor nothing less than something fortuitous that we human beings can engage in to better our generally difficult lives*.²⁹

²⁹ I would like to thank Matthias Koßler, Thomas Regehly, Lore Hühn, Chris Janaway, Fred Beiser, Marco Segala, and the audience at the Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft 200th anniversary conference on WWR 1 at the Goethe Universität, Frankfurt (October 2019) for helpful discussion of an earlier version of this chapter, as well as Alex Neill, Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, Melissa Zinkin, Rachel Zuckert, Des Hogan, Helga Varden, James Messina, and audiences at the North American Division of the Schopenhauer Society panel at the Central American Philosophical Association (February 2020) and at the North American Kant Society conference hosted (on Zoom) by Binghamton University.

*The Hour of Consecration: Inspiration and Cognition
in Schopenhauer's Genius*

Cheryl Foster

Introduction

It has perhaps become a truism that Schopenhauer's enduring appeal rests in ascetic prescriptions found in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* (henceforth, WWR). And such a truism may ossify into dogma when aesthetic apprehension, whether contemplative or communicative, is understood merely as an avenue out of Will's tyranny, albeit a temporary one relative to that issuing from a more rigorous and detached lifestyle. I wish to suggest, however, that the appeal of the Third Book in WWR, and in it Schopenhauer's thinking about aesthetic apprehension more broadly, may rest in a competing dimension of his metaphysics – namely, the phenomena of inspiration and intuitive cognition (this latter spanning both contemplative and communicative forms).

Arguments have been bandied about for some time over whether Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory succeeds within, alongside, or despite his overarching metaphysics. While the opportunities for such inquiries remain rich, I intend here to approach Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory through the lens of one who maintains a semblance of artistic practice but has also spent the better part of the last fifteen years working professionally alongside coastal scientists and managers. As my domain of artistic practice is performance and the theatre, however, I add Schopenhauer's caveat that acting "leads straight to madness" (WWR 2, 417), so it is entirely possible that I will be an unreliable guide.

Even so, my experience in applied science offers sober balance to the actorly part of me, and both, in concert with philosophy, position me to discern something of singular and compelling clarity about Schopenhauer's theory of artistic ability; in this I am not alone. For that reason, an investigation into the phenomenon that gives rise to genius – the moment of aesthetic apprehension or inspiration – occupies a significant portion of this essay and proceeds more in the spirit of Montaigne than Nelson Goodman, albeit with too many

footnotes. An additional investigation into what Schopenhauer intends when discussing creativity as such, and the communication of the Idea that was revealed via inspiration, takes up the rest of the space – especially as these distinctions give rise to a contrast between genius and what Schopenhauer calls “mere talent.” This latter distinction, though at times troubling and at other times vague, forces me to put on the gloves of argumentation to defend a vital difference between aesthetic and conceptual cognition.

My interest in these matters is not merely theoretical. By clarifying Schopenhauer’s thinking about both inspiration and intuitive cognition, we may begin to see that current cultural presumptions concerning the supremacy of scientific and pragmatic thinking result in a kind of epistemic chauvinism that mitigates how we view and value aesthetic creativity within a civilization. Furthermore, a reified misunderstanding of art and aesthetic value across social institutions can engender a neglect of children who show artistic ability or potential but whose lives are shaped in part by structural inequities impacted by income, race, ethnicity, gender, family stability, disability, health disparities, education, and life options. If, today, a hierarchy of value places scientific and pragmatic endeavors far above those of creative and humanistic work (a 180-degree reversal of Schopenhauer’s own ranking of cognitive merit), there may be ethical fallout in the narrowness of institutional emphases regarding the education of children, particularly in how we assess their capacities through abstract, analytic, and quantifiable instruments.

In this spirit, I offer two focal points in the essay that follows: a reconsideration of the inspiration behind Schopenhauer’s conception of genius as well as a closer look at his assumed distinction between genius and talent. My hope is that such a reconsideration, its flaws and Schopenhauer’s unpalatable dimensions notwithstanding, can impel us to achieve a richer vantage point from which to examine the existence of actual artistic ability – and to defend aesthetic cognition as well as productive creativity from assaults by both plutocratic pragmatism and misguided scientism.

I Inspiration: The Hour of Consecration

I.I

Schopenhauer’s conception of genius comes bundled with an intuitive apprehension of the world’s aesthetic aspects as well as an ability to communicate such apprehension through art.

Now if wholly objective, intuitive apprehension, cleansed of all willing, is the condition for the *pleasure* of aesthetic objects, it is even more a condition of their *production*. Every good painting, every genuine poem bears the marks of the state of mind we have described. This is because only what has arisen from intuition, or what has been directly excited by it, contains the living seed from which true and original accomplishments can grow: not only in the visual arts but in poetry as well, and philosophy. The jumping off point for every beautiful work, for every great or profound thought, is a completely objective intuition. But this is conditioned entirely by the complete silence of the will, after which what remains is the human being as the pure subject of cognition. The occasion that promotes this state is genius. (WWR 2, 388)

When in proper working form, the capacities for aesthetic receptivity and production result in authentic works of art, but Schopenhauer's vision of genius has more to do with the tethering of good art to inspiration and intuition than it does with elaborating the pragmatic process of artistic creation. In this first focal point of the essay, I explore what artistic inspiration is for Schopenhauer, ask whether the artist grasps herself as being in such a state, and examine Schopenhauer's inchoate ideas about passivity and activity as these pertain to the artist's consciousness during the moment of inspiration – and, subsequent to that, the process of creative *work*.

I.2

What is this inspiration that marks the occasion of genius, or rather, the retreat of will in knowing the Idea? After all, Schopenhauer notes, “people have always considered the activity of genius as inspiration . . . the activity of a superhuman being distinct from the individual himself and which takes possession of the individual only periodically” (WWR 1, 212). This state of possession involves being “seized” with a consciousness (WWR 1, 204) of something more than instrumental relations at work in the world – to wit, “the true and genuine essence of things discloses and reveals itself first and foremost to intuition” (WWR 2, 395) and “expresses itself spontaneously” (WWR 2, 381).¹ The genius is “riveted by his observations of the spectacle of the will's objectification” (WWR 1, 295) and loses “sight of cognition of the interconnection between things: the particular object of

¹ It is relevant to note here that by “spontaneous” Schopenhauer does not indicate an on-the-spot “expression” of one's inner state (such as equating a betrayal of feeling with expression, criticized by Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*). Rather, Schopenhauer indicates here the natural, noncalculating, nonconceptual, noninstrumental *impulse* by which aesthetic perception gives rise, in some, to the responsive, inspired act of creation.

their contemplation, or the present that they grasp with exaggerated vividness appears in such a bright light that the rest of the links in the chain to which it belongs retreat into darkness as it were" (WWR 1, 217).

Such a state, at times feeling more religious than aesthetic given Schopenhauer's incantatory prose, cannot be intended;² rather, "our entire interest is won over to cognition without any excitation of the will, putting us into a state of pure cognition" (WWR 2, 392).

Works of genius do not stem from intention or choice; genius is instead guided by an instinctive sort of necessity. – What is termed the rousing of genius, the hour of consecration, the moment of inspiration is nothing other than the emancipation of the intellect that does not sink into inactivity or languor when released from its service to the will, but is instead briefly active by itself and of its own accord. (WWR 2, 397)

Inspiration thus descends upon us, seizes us, rouses us, impresses itself, thrusts us beyond individuation, and clears a space for immersion in the state of intuitive apprehension, a state free from pragmatic interest or conceptual relation. It calls only to a few, whom Schopenhauer deems superhuman, and as phenomenologically endured, can be neither willed nor made permanent.

I.3

In addition to characterizing the uninvited, flashpoint feel of inspiration, Schopenhauer indicates that the genius is at once aware of her special status, yet unable to articulate, in causal or systematic terms, how, precisely, her art work came into being. In this, he points toward a kind of discursive incommensurability among the moment of caught consciousness, the process of creation, and the product instantiating these. At first this incommensurability may seem at odds with Schopenhauer's portrait of genius. Those with abilities and merits, he insists, cannot help but be aware of them (WWR 2, 443); "someone great recognizes himself in everything and thus the whole: he does not live exclusively in the microcosm as those others do, but much more in the macrocosm" (WWR 2, 402). In addition, during moments of inspiration, anyone so engrossed in the intuitive apprehension of nature "will thus immediately be aware that as such he

² For further discussion of this, see Matthias Köfler, "The Artist as Subject of Pure Cognition" in *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Bart Vandenabeele (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 198; and Bart Vandenabeele, "Schopenhauer and the Objectivity of Art" in Vandenabeele, *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, 231.

is the condition, which is to say the bearer of the world of all objective being" (WWR 1, 204).

Yet, "[p]recisely because the Idea is and remains intuitive, the artist is not conscious of the intent and purpose of his work abstractly; an Idea rather than a concept hovers before him: this is why he cannot give an account of what he does: he is driven merely by feelings, as people like to say, and works unconsciously, even instinctively" (WWR 1, 261). Geniuses "abandon cognition of the connection between things, because it is cognition of relations" (WWR 1, 217) and, at times pouring their energies into the formal communication of what they have apprehended in inspiration, are thought to be inarticulate about their own work. For this reason, any enterprise surrounding the elucidation of a work's internal relations or consequential merits falls not to the artist but to the critic or philosopher. As Sandra Shapshay observes, "Schopenhauer does believe that philosophical knowledge is advanced by way of poetic insight, but the truth of such knowledge is vouchsafed by way of other, rational foundations, and thus Schopenhauer forges a novel symbiosis between aesthetic perception and philosophical argumentation."³

If intuitive cognition remains at the heart of what makes artists particularly gifted, there is no reason to suppose that they will also function well in the spheres of either critical communication or reasoned justification (in an arts critic, evaluative sense). Moreover, if asked to capture the essence of their work in ordinary, relational language, an artist may wonder at the questioner's ignorance of why an artist undertakes her work in the first place. If ordinary language were adequate to the job of conveying such essences, she would have simply used it. Instead, as Schopenhauer insists, "even famous passages of famous poets shrivel up and lose their appeal when reproduced accurately in prose" (WWR 2, 446). The work of genius resists reduction or even a poor translation. In this sense, the authentic work produced is ontologically discrete, meaning it attains a level of individuation of its own as a thing in the world. No attempt to "capture" it in some other form – for the form remains indelibly original to and inseparable from the specific work – will approach anything like aesthetic significance.

Here we see a crucial difference between a prosaic, post facto description of a work, or even an analytic critique of a specific piece, and the activity of what I like to call "aesthetic pedagogy." Such a pedagogy requires a heightened

³ Sandra Shapshay, "Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense: Metaphor and Metonymy in Schopenhauer's Philosophy," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 no. 2 (2008): 212.

capacity for both seeing what is essential to a work's individual character (whether formally or in terms of Ideas expressed) *and* bringing others to see it too. The latter ability requires the perceived presence of the work to be efficacious, for only in perception can a work's singular facets be apprehended. Teaching others to appreciate a coperceived work thus hovers between intuitive elements of creativity and discursive elements of critical practice. In fact, with more than three decades of teaching aesthetics behind me, I suspect it travels back and forth between them all the time. Schopenhauer indicates that philosophy can be an intuitive enterprise, not merely an analytic or synthetic one, so philosophy as an enterprise, especially philosophy as a form of teaching, may bridge an extant gap between the work of art and conceptual insights about it.⁴ But the artist as the generator of the art work to be appreciated, with its Idea to be apprehended, has neither the obligation nor often the ability to articulate precisely what is going on either in her process or her end product.

To explore the incommensurability of art and its explanation (either productively or interpretively), I turn to Edith Wharton's more grounded observations about artistic creativity from her autobiography *A Backward Glance*. Among the customary narratives of friends met and travels taken, Wharton reflects on her own relationship to both inspiration and the discursive incommensurability surrounding her creative process. I feel authorized to do so in part by Schopenhauer's own observation that "particularly autobiographies, have greater value than authentic history with respect to knowledge of the essence of humanity . . . a true description of the life of the individual within a narrow sphere will show all the forms and nuances of the way human beings act" (WWR 1, 273–274).

Wharton was a voracious reader of philosophy who, in adulthood, had to scramble to rectify the deficits of her genteel but gendered upbringing. During January 1902 she was immersed in WWR, as indicated in a letter to Sara Norton, daughter of the scholar Charles Norton.

⁴ I am very grateful to Sandra Shapshay for raising this possibility for philosophy, and philosophical teaching about art, throughout a variety of her works. Though not the province of this essay, I suggest here an opening for humanists as a whole to rethink the sphere and value of their everyday work, and reembrace the legitimacy of collective, live-time inquiry as sitting at the heart of what we do. When that aspect of our mission is appreciated, we can function as missionaries for the value of the arts and humanities far beyond the classroom: prisons, community groups, among the elderly, with children. But such outreach must be lifted from its perceived secondary status within today's professionalized academy if it is to be supported, encouraged, and recognized as the particular province of artistic and humanistic quality. A nod here to Judith Norman, whose own collaborative work in prison environments suggests the far-reaching implications of Schopenhauer's philosophy of art.

While I had the “floo” I read Schopenhauer, not “en bloc,” but the chapter on the ascetic life, which Mrs. Winty Chanler had spoken of as a marvelous analysis of *état d’âme* of the saint. (in “Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.”) How strange is rummaging in all that old metaphysical lumber! – As for the Sainthood, I prefer it as I find it in Pascal and St François de Sales⁵

Despite the humorous dismissal of the Fourth Book here, in the following passages Wharton eerily channels Schopenhauerian thinking when commenting on her inability to articulate her own creative process. Looking back over what she refers to as the “slow stammering beginnings of my literary life,” Wharton puzzles over “the fascinating but probably idle attempt to discover *how it is all done*, and exactly what happens at the ‘fine point of the soul’ where the creative act, like the mystic’s union with the Unknowable, really seems to take place.”⁶

Later, she continues:

I have often been asked whether the writing of “The Valley of Decision” was not preceded by months of hard study. I had never studied hard in my life, and it was far too late to learn how when I began to write “The Valley of Decision”; but whenever I make this reply it is received with polite incredulity. The truth is that I have always found it hard to explain that gradual absorption into my pores of a myriad details – details of landscape, architecture, old furniture, eighteenth century portraits, the gossip of contemporary diarists and travelers . . . I did not travel and look and read with the writing of the book in mind; but my years of intimacy and imperceptibly fashioned the tale and compelled me to write it.⁷

And later still:

few are greatly interested in these deeper processes in their art; their conscious investigations of method seldom seem to go deeper than syntax, and it is immeasurably deeper that the vital interest begins . . . When I began to talk with novelists about the art of fiction I was amazed at the frequently repeated phrase “I’ve been hunting about for subjects.” Hunting about for a subject! Good Heavens! I remember once, when an old friend of the pen made this rather wistful complaint, carelessly rejoining: “Subjects? But they swarm about me like mosquitoes!” . . . And only years afterward . . . did

⁵ Edith Wharton, *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, ed. Richard Warrington Baldwin Lewis (London: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 57. Wharton returned to WWR and counted it among her favorite books, as we know from a list of titles displayed at The Mount, the Wharton museum in Lenox, Massachusetts. She also admired Schopenhauer’s prose style, in particular, at other points in her letters.

⁶ Edith Wharton, *A Backwards Glance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 121.

⁷ Wharton, *Backwards Glance*, 128.

I understand how presumptuous that answer must have sounded. The truth is, I have never attached much importance to subject, partly because every incident, every situation, presents itself to me in light of story-telling material, and partly from the conviction that the possibilities of a given subject are – whatever a given imagination can make of them. But by the time I had written three or four novels I had learned to keep my silence on this point.⁸

A few things are notable here, not least Wharton's recognition that her own creative life differed, phenomenologically, from those of workaday writers who struggled to light on a topic. In her fecund receptivity, subjects stuck to her like mosquitoes, and stories compelled themselves to life through her. In addition, Wharton's realization that stories can sprout up anywhere echoes Schopenhauer's own repeated insistence that inspiration does not discriminate and that any subject, no matter how insignificant or minor in the affairs of the world or nature, was not below the notice of genius (See, for example, WWR I, 206, 208, 220, 271; WWR 2, 406, 453–454).

More to my point, she conveys a sense in which details of life were absorbed into her pores, and explicitly indicates that she did not approach her creative work conceptually or instrumentally, on the hunt, as it were, for characters or settings. Instead, she cultivated her receptivity such that her capacity to take in and eventually channel vivid images and situations was enlivened and deployed. In the passages cited, Wharton knows she possesses a special gift, and in doing so approaches something like the self-knowledge of Schopenhauer's genius. Despite this, she also recognizes her utter inability to explain either the genesis of her inspiration or its method. But as Schopenhauer notes, "the artist is not conscious of the intent and purpose of his work abstractly; and Idea rather than a concept hovers before him: this is why he cannot give an account of what he does" (WWR I, 261).

Julian Young captures such intuitively ignited moments of aesthetic apprehension as Wharton describes with what he terms a doctrine of aesthetic veracity: Ephemera guided by interest are cleared away and "On a mind that is pure receptivity, reality impresses itself just as, in itself, it is."⁹ The idea of the observer as recipient of an impress, however, like the emulsion of film hit by light, or a saint being stung by stigmata, remains a problematic one in Schopenhauer's thinking, as we shall see in the following section.

⁸ Wharton, *Letters*, 198.

⁹ Julian Young, "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Death and Salvation," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 no. 2 (2008): 319.

I.4

Thus far, we have an outline of what artistic inspiration is like for the recipient of it, as well as a glimpse of the extent and limits of genial awareness. Problems may ensue nonetheless if we do not pause in this subsection to consider whether Schopenhauer's dependence on apparent passivity in his development of inspiration is in tension with his insistence on active and imaginative artistic production. Sophia Vasalou directly remarks the paradox at the heart of Schopenhauer's characterization of how art happens. In one sense the observer-genius is passive when called to an "inexplicable transition or spontaneous ecstasy"¹⁰ in the moment of inspiration. Schopenhauer underscores this part of the paradox – the fact that the genius does not choose the moment of, or capacity for, inspiration – when he asserts, "works of genius do not stem from intention of choice; genius is instead guided by an instinctive sort of necessity" (WWR 2, 397).

In another sense, however, the genius is described as actively contributing through imagination to the supplementation or completion of nature via art (WWR 1, 210, 248), and they do so as a form of conjuring – hardly a metaphor of artistic passivity! "Only by virtue of imagination can genius conjure up every object or event in a vivid image Someone with imagination can, as it were, conjure up spirits that promptly reveal to him truths that in the naked reality of things are exhibited only weakly" (WWR 2, 296).

How, then, to resolve the paradox Vasalou highlights between passive revelation on the one hand and active conjuring on the other?

Superficially we might collapse revelation and conjuring into one, as each implies a mysterious or alchemical element of artistic genius, a trope that has been stretched at times to take the "lostness" of the self in aesthetic contemplation and imagination a bit too literally, a temptation Schopenhauer warned against. A more hopeful resolution to Vasalou's paradox, however, might preserve the collapse of revelation and conjuring by proposing that inspiration and imaginative production are simply different points along the spectrum of the genius's peculiar mode of consciousness¹¹ or mode of being in the world. In this version of the collapse, apprehension sits at one end of the artistic process and production at the other. W. S. Clifton, for example, has stressed the less mysterious

¹⁰ Sophia Vasalou, *Schopenhauer and the Aesthetic Standpoint: Philosophy as a Practice of the Sublime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32.

¹¹ Vandenabeele, "Objectivity of Art," 222.

idea of defamiliarization as a crucial dimension of Schopenhauer's account of artistic inspiration,¹² where "conjuring" merely connotes the childlike or foreign dimension of aesthetic apprehension and engagement, one that allows the artist to create a work which, in turn, allows even ordinary people to see a specific aspect of the world anew (WWR 2, 387, 391, 404, 411, 412–413).

This resolution preserves cognition within both inspiration and imaginative production, for "the artist needs to think when composing his work" (WWR 2, 426). Such thinking, however, must always be preceded by the immediate and spontaneous intuition at the heart of aesthetic apprehension. "An intuitive grasp has always been the generative process in which every true artwork, every immortal thought has received the spark of life" (WWR 2, 395). In this reading of the paradox, both inspiration and imaginative "conjuring" occur when perception is cleansed of all willing. This cleansing marks the occasion of genius, not merely in attaining the clarity of mind to apprehend Ideas, but also the energy and inclination to produce works of art to convey them (WWR 2, 388, 399). Inspiration and imaginative production are then resolved through the vector of cognition and, through the efforts of genius, even ordinary people can "experience a momentary increase in the intensity of our intuitive intelligence, then all at once we see things with completely different eyes" (WWR 2, 389).

That wraps up quite nicely, but Clifton's acute insights about defamiliarization do not license a stretch into the intellectual calisthenics required to rectify Vasalou's paradox between revelation and conjuring. This is because WWR taken as a whole tilts under a vast imbalance between the attention given to the actual process of creating art, on the one hand, and that given to those things that come before and after the process, on the other. In other words, WWR offers a mighty edifice of both inspiration at the moment of inception and analysis of specific types of artistic product – but the paradox sits in the silent center of such walls, a gap (WWR 2, 417), an implied but neglected habitat for the labor of productive creation. Relative inattention to the actual productive process of art's creation points to a gap in Schopenhauer's account of genius: He has much to say about features of the artist, the phenomenology of artistic inspiration, the grades of Idea's objectification that emerge via different levels of artwork, and even precise features of specific art media, but very little indeed about the

¹² W. S. Clifton, "Schopenhauer and Murdoch on the Ethical Value of the Loss of Self in Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51 no. 4 (2017): 17–19.

trial-and-error, *Sturm und Drang* process of bringing a specific work into being.¹³

Schopenhauer did to some extent acknowledge artistic production as a secondary, technical aspect of art's emergence, punctuating the germinating event or intuition and the eventual, communicative work. While the inspiration behind authentic art as Schopenhauer understands it should arrive in "one fell swoop" (WWR 2, 416), "reflection, intention, and deliberate choice play a significant role: understanding, technique, routine must fill in the gaps left by genial inspiration and enthusiasm, and all kinds of necessary secondary projects must run through the only truly brilliant parts like cement" (WWR 2, 417). Brilliance is reserved only for the "parts" of art that arrive in a flash of insight and end up as vehicles for momentary apprehension by others, while the painstaking and frustrating work of practice, refinement, and killing one's darlings through *restraint* serves as an anonymous midwife, an undervalued laborer, at the birth of artistic originality.

This relegation of the work process to handmaid status lurking in the wake of artistic inspiration appears at first to be troubling, especially to those of us who devote significant portions of our precious finitude to efforts at artistic creation. As committed artists often agree, the process between initial or even ongoing moments of inspiration and the unveiling of a finished work involves many hours of – dare we say it in the midst of an essay on genius, the pure subject of knowing devoid of all willing? – disciplined, systematic, analytic, discursive, skilled, goal-oriented, and even collaborative *effort*. Yet Schopenhauer's reasoning about the relative weight or importance of process in art's creation means he remains unusually reticent on the work involved to bring art into being and, in doing so, hints at the threat of romanticism amidst an otherwise empirical account of artistic creativity.¹⁴

One way to lessen this difficulty of imbalance from within Schopenhauer's own metaphysics would be to think of artistic inspiration – the moment of inspiration and possibly ongoing visitations by intuitive aesthetic apprehension, which for Schopenhauer germinate and guide the development of original, authentic art – as ontologically distinct from the process of artistic creation. This could amount to confessing that, for all his elaborate, impressively detailed explications of various art media, he was not much interested in

¹³ This is perhaps because elucidating creative processes is, in itself, a much harder thing to articulate cohesively. See Kofler, "Artist as Subject of Pure Cognition," 202.

¹⁴ Lucian Krukowski, "Schopenhauer and the Aesthetics of Creativity" in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

the critical enterprise of considering and appreciating particular works of art as especially *accomplished*.

Notice in the passage below, for example, Schopenhauer's own admission that the skill of bringing apprehension into the realm of efficacious communication is not, as such, instinctive, but *acquired* in service to a motivating vision – and that the conduit for the apprehension of the Idea does not much matter in the end, beyond perhaps the necessity of a conduit to make nature's beauty accessible to the ordinary mind.

The artist allows us to look into the world with his eyes. The fact that he has these eyes, that he has cognition of the essential aspects of things lying outside all relations, is precisely the gift of genius, and it is innate; but the fact that he can also lend this gift to us and allow us to use his eyes: this is acquired, it is the technical aspect of art . . . the more thorough philosophical discussion of the beautiful and the sublime that follows will discuss them both in nature and in art simultaneously . . . I will next consider what takes place when people are moved by the beautiful, when we are moved by the sublime: the question of whether this emotion, proceeds directly from nature, from life, or whether it can be passed on to them only through the medium of art makes no real difference, only a superficial one. (WWR 1, 219)

Despite Schopenhauer's cosmopolitan acquaintance with what he deems to be the great music and art of Europe, and his extensive commentary (too extensive!) on the manner by which specific works demonstrate the veracity of his metaphysical worldview, Schopenhauer may not have loved art *as art*. Like many a professional philosopher grinding up the same examples to illustrate their reasoning or concepts (no more Duchamp Fountains, please!), Schopenhauer at times appears to draw on his voluminous mental concordance of masterpieces only to reinforce his own epistemic assertions. Nature appears to inspire him more as a thinker; art merely constructs a habitable house for naturally derived Ideas.

In short, inspiration occurs, unbidden and unforced, and then somewhere down the line, conjured by imaginative technique, the work of art emerges to communicate the object of intuitive cognition. Despite his relative indifference to process, we can, however, consider applauding Schopenhauer's recognition of artistic inspiration as enduringly relevant, given the experience and testimony of artists, while suggesting simultaneously that his theory fails to provide a full-bodied account of how artworks issue like contrails in the wake of that inspiration. After all, Schopenhauer genuinely does give voice to the phenomenon of inspiration in artistic creation and understands its significance as a mode of cognition

undergirding artistic originality, which seems, again, corroborated by Wharton's thinking about her own experience.

Consider, especially, the passage below, where even she, the artist, struggles to isolate the process of creation while offering an eloquent, persuasive portrait of what the inspiration of *genius is like in experience*.

What I want to try to capture is an impression of the elusive moment when these people who haunt my brain actually begin to speak within me with their own voices. The situating of my take, and its descriptive and narrative portions, I am conscious of conducting, though often unaware of how the story first came to me, pleading to be told; but as soon as the dialogue begins, I become a mere recording instrument, and my hand never hesitates because my mind has not to choose, but only set down what these stupid or intelligent, lethargic or passionate, people say to each other in a language . . . these people of mine, whose ultimate destiny I know so well, walk to it by ways unrealized to me beforehand . . . I can only say that the process, though it takes place in some secret region on the sheer edge of consciousness, is always illuminated by the full light of my critical attention. What happens there is as real and tangible as my encounters with my friends and neighbors, often more so, though on an entirely different plane. It produces in me great emotional excitement, quite unrelated to the joy or sorrow caused by real happenings, but as intense, and with as great an appearance of reality; and my two lives, divided between these equally real yet totally unrelated worlds, have gone on thus, side by side equally absorbing, but wholly isolated from each other.¹⁵

As a mere recording instrument, Wharton pays tribute to the feeling of what it is like to be governed by an inspiring vision in the creation of art. Admitting that the voices come to her from she knows not where – Schopenhauer might remark, *from the apprehension of the Idea of human types, as gleaned unintentionally via your superior receptivity, except that you are a woman, so oh well* – Wharton's work takes place on the sheer edge of consciousness, which harkens back to our earlier consideration of inspiration as shifting us out of ordinary awareness and into a state of will-less apprehension. Most of all, she confesses that what happens in such a state, and through such a creative space, is tangible and real; she claims for imaginary entities a metaphysical heft that Schopenhauer would recognize as existing beyond the literal realm of cause and effect in everyday life, for the genius “perceives things in the world, but not the world itself” (WWR 2, 399).

Thus, while inspiration descends uninvited and one can only wait passively for its visit, imagination, by contrast, is the divining rod of

¹⁵ Wharton, *Backwards Glance*, 202–204.

actively knowing *what to do* with the visitation as well as functionally *how to do it*. This leads us to the second focal point of this essay: Is there such a thing as genius, or at least, such a thing as natural artistic ability that is distinguished in kind and process from the virtues of scientific or pragmatic reasoning and achievements? Barbara Hannan, in her book *The Riddle of the World*, throws down an unusual gauntlet in eradicating Schopenhauer's distinction between artistic genius and scientific talent. To defend the existence of such a distinction, as well as the very existence of something akin to innate artistic ability, we require a more rigorous phenomenology of intuitive cognition that governs both aesthetic inspiration and creative communication.

2 Talent vs. Genius in the Bout for Best Cognition

2.1

Already at the outset of this focal point, our customary understanding of genius is riven by a hidden premise concerning the sorts of folks to whom it calls. Consistent with Schopenhauer's own perception that intellect serves will and thus the use of intellect will be valued according to its instrumentality in pursuit of interested ends, *we* tend in a post-Renaissance era to align *our* understanding of genius with analytical, scientific, technological, managerial, or practically inventive innovation of a kind that is not only acknowledged primarily within its own age but also lauded for its measurable achievements.¹⁶

This is visible across a very wide range of indicators, from abstract assessments of ability such as those seen on Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) or Stanford–Binet intelligence tests, to adulation for the maverick and biographical determination of tech entrepreneurs; from bauble-headed Einsteins and Edisons in the back windows of our cars, to cultlike corporate gatherings around performative unveilings of gadgets. In our current understanding of the term, the genius is most often, if not a scientist as such, then science-y, and almost always white and male insofar as he enters the lexicon of public awareness.

But Schopenhauer understood, and skewered, this view of genius, and set up his own easel in a very different grove indeed – a grove that we tend

¹⁶ For colloquial indicators of this reversal today, see, for example, Claudia Kalb, "What Makes a Genius?," *National Geographic Magazine* (May 2017); Heidi Moawad, "Are the Brains of Geniuses Different?," *Neurology Live* (July 15, 2016); and Greg Satell, "How a Genius Thinks," *Forbes Magazine* (June 1, 2014).

to think of as the realm of talent. When remarking the experience of a choral concert, or the impact of an exhibition, or the structure of a novel, for example, we today might understandably assess whether or not the performers, the painter, or the writer showed any talent as evidenced by the merits of their artistic innovation or mastery. In other words, what Schopenhauer alludes to as genius in his discussion of artistic ability, we today may be more apt to think of as creative or imaginative talent; and where Schopenhauer discusses and often denigrates “mere talent” as pertaining to outstanding scientific or practical endeavors, we are likely to slap on the label of genius.

To prevent a scientific carryover of today’s connotations into our reading of Schopenhauer’s distinction between genius and talent, we need to remind ourselves that, for Schopenhauer, scientific and pragmatic achievements¹⁷ exert analytic clarity on a tangle of relational endeavors, and in doing so follow the principle of sufficient reason. By contrast?

[W]hat mode of cognition is concerned with the truly essential aspect of the world alone, an aspect that exists outside and independently of all relations, the true content of the world’s appearances, an essence that is not subjected to change and is thus cognized at all times with the same degree of truth, – in a word, *Ideas*, which are the immediate and adequate objecthood of the thing in itself the will? – It is *art*, the work of genius. (WWR I, 207)

So art, the work of genius, offers a mode of cognition, jump-starting intuitive thinking that is “directly opposed to rational or abstract cognition” (WWR I, 211), where “the appearance of the world always hovers before his eyes as something foreign to him” (WWR 2, 404) and is “intellectual, not sensual” (WWR 2, 395). Talent, by contrast, is a very different mode, one that “follows the principle of sufficient reason,” which in turn “confers cleverness” (WWR I, 211). Its firm grasp of relations in accordance with causality and motion is an index of shrewdness (WWR I, 213), for “even someone with an enormous capacity for understanding and reason, who could almost be called wise, is utterly distinct from genius in that his intellect retains a *practical bent*” (WWR 2, 404). While all theoretical endeavors strive toward a single point (WWR 2, 406), “talent is like a marksman who hits a target others cannot reach; genius is like a marksman who hits a target too far for others even to see” (WWR 2, 408).

¹⁷ “What differentiates science from ordinary cognition is merely its form, systematic nature, the way it facilitates cognition by assembling all particulars under universals through subordination to concepts” (WWR I, 199–200).

Schopenhauer's opposition of genius to talent, however, and the implied opposition between original but unrecognized creativity and derivative but heralded application, dredges up unsettling, misleading, and potentially unnecessary dimensions of the distinction. Three such dimensions deserve examination: the first faces head on Schopenhauer's bigotry in the way people devolve onto one side or the other of the genius–talent opposition; the second exacerbates Schopenhauer's conventional and snobbish elitism by treating genius as especially rare and special; and the third collapses the genius–talent distinction altogether and, with it, any meaningful difference between intuitive and conceptual cognition.

2.2

In his analysis of Schopenhauer's influence on Wittgenstein, David Avraham Weiner notes that Wittgenstein fretted over his place within the distinction between talent and genius. Wittgenstein specifically compared himself to Schopenhauer and other philosophical geniuses. His sense of inferiority was fueled by the anti-Semitic work of Otto Weininger, who converted to Christianity from Judaism and associated Judaism with talent, which he characterized as a mechanical, reproductive capacity rather than an original, generative endowment.¹⁸ The German word for practical intelligence, *Klugheit*, is frequently associated with anti-Semitism; the barely masked implications of a similar sentiment are evident in Schopenhauer's cleaving of ability into legible, practical facility and oblique, rare originality.¹⁹ Examining the various uses of the term by Kant, for example, Douglas McCaughey argues for the “metaphor interference” of *Klugheit* and the degree to which an incendiary, anti-Semitic meaning is baked into the more literal meaning of the term in Kant's allegedly empirical assertions about culture.²⁰

Schopenhauer's own anti-Semitism shows up in several places in association with the distinction between talent and genius and quite shockingly so in his dismissal of Jewish communities as “a petty, isolated, stubborn, hierarchical (i.e., ruled by delusion) and obscure group of people” (WWR

¹⁸ David Avraham Weiner, *Genius and Talent: Schopenhauer's Influence on Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), 19–21.

¹⁹ I am indebted to the editors of this volume for drawing my attention to this epithetical use of the term. Consult, in relation to this, WWR 2, 404 – Schopenhauer's disdain for cleverness as oriented in all seriousness toward a practical bent.

²⁰ Douglas McCaughey, “Was Kant Anti-Semitic? with an ‘Addendum on Duty.’” (Creative Commons Licensure, Willamette University, 2020), 11–13.

I, 258). It is worth noting how the word “petty” functions in WWR – “all endeavours directed to personal goals are *petty*” (WWR 2, 402) – linking Jewishness to the very quality Schopenhauer opposes to the elevation of genius (WWR I, 211; WWR 2, 402). The appellation “genius” as a “noble predicate” applies only to a “true hero”:

it signifies that in defiance of human nature they have not pursued their own interest, they have not lived for themselves but for everyone. – Just as the vast majority of people must obviously *always* be petty and can *never* be great . . . Every great man must nonetheless often be a mere individual with only himself in view, and that means being *petty*.” (WWR 2, 403)

Petty in its italicized emphasis emerges as a signifier for ordinariness, self-interest, a preoccupation with small, relational things – and as such underscores Schopenhauer’s anti-Semitic identification of Jewishness with an incapacity for genius.

The implication, then, for Schopenhauer? Christians can be geniuses, Jewish thinkers merely practical – and left out of art’s ethical import.

The bigotry inherent in Schopenhauer’s vision of who gets the call of genius also extends to women, who are banished from its possession. Weininger fuses the two, associating Jewish talent not only with derivative reproduction of others’ ideas but also femininity,²¹ while Schopenhauer explicitly limits females to being talented in direct contrast to the possibility of male genius (WWR 2, 400) – a shunning consistent with Schopenhauer’s “tiresome misogyny” throughout his work and in life.²² After all, it is essential that the genius live a solitary life (WWR 2, 407) – hard to do, for example, if one is occupied with relational duties such as bearing, birthing, or raising children, or caring for elderly parents.

Even the somatic roots of genius devolve to gendered proclivities: the “practical,” organizing brain and nervous system come from the mothers’ side, but genius involves a playful temperament “which comes from the father’s side” and, when not the result of the father in his prime, can result in madness, unbearable restlessness, or petulance (WWR 2, 410–411). Thus, the first troubling corollary of Schopenhauer’s distinction between genius and talent is his bigoted exclusion of women and Jews from susceptibility to the call of inspiration and a capacity for generative originality. This distinction becomes even more obvious when aligning

²¹ Weiner, *Genius and Talent*, 114.

²² Barbara Hannan, *The Riddle of the World: A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer’s Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 117; Peter Lewis, *Arthur Schopenhauer* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 107.

genius with perceptual acuity and productive originality, but talent with shrewd cleverness and the practical manipulation of relations.

2.3

Beyond bigotry, a second dimension concerns the juxtaposition of talent used as a Schopenhauerian epithet for conceptual, shrewd cleverness (e.g. WWR 1, 261; WWR 2, 396) and genius invoked as a quasi-mystical state reserved for “the elect” (WWR 2, 413).²³ This second dimension of the distinction threatens to pull our analysis in an unproductive direction, which emphasizes genius and its products as a form of cultural sheetrock, walling off exclusive, thinly populated spaces for aesthetic authenticity. Aesthetic exclusivity exacerbates Schopenhauer’s structural elitism and perpetuates what Lucian Krukowski identifies as Schopenhauer’s conventional and incipient snobbery, making “the creation of art a difficult and exclusive matter – the mysteries of genius – and the apprehension of art only somewhat less so – the restrictiveness of appreciation.”²⁴

I take brief note as others have recently done²⁵ of the exceptionality of genius in Schopenhauer’s account. He frequently expounds the rarity of genius as a phenomenon, observing it “only in exceptional cases” (WWR 1, 200) and further reserving any aesthetic apprehension at all “by way of exception” (WWR 2, 389) within a life otherwise dominated by boredom and struggle in cyclic succession for all but the gifted artist (though even the genius has fallow periods of unrest and struggle like the rest of us). Genius consists in “an abnormal surplus of the intellect” (WWR 2, 394) that predisposes it to madness (WWR 1, 214), a state with which it shares the quality, among others, of pertaining to “relatively few people” (WWR 1, 215). So few are the geniuses at any given point in history that they seek in vain the society of those like themselves (WWR 1, 209) and end up keeping company with books and art left behind by the geniuses of the past (WWR 2, 407). Geniuses live among the ordinary without actually belonging to them (PP 1, 376) and are advised to avoid the contaminants of improper education (PP 1, 279) or too much intimate affection (PP 1, 396), the latter of which Schopenhauer stresses in an analogy with dogs.

Previous observations of bigotry, elitism, and exclusivity can only be underscored on such an account, for if one belongs to a temporal club of

²³ See also Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 59; Lewis, *Schopenhauer*, 112–114.

²⁴ Krukowski, *Aesthetics of Creativity*, 7.

²⁵ See, for example, Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 39; Koßler, *Artist as Subject as Pure Cognition*, 200.

one, that hardly bodes well for either the emergence of art as an efficacious vehicle for aesthetic communication or the capacity of ordinary people to appreciate it. As Hannan remarks,²⁶ Schopenhauer seems inured to the social structures that might keep others out of his club. Nonetheless, without downplaying the unpalatable and sometimes resentful snobbery of Schopenhauer's assertions,²⁷ it is still fruitful to ask whether, through his account of artistic inspiration and his recognition of a distinction between intuitive and conceptual cognition, Schopenhauer has not – in a meaningful way that has resounded through several generations of thinkers and artists – laid the groundwork for a more vital and legitimate appreciation of aesthetic activity alongside that of science and pragmatic commerce.

The bigotry and elitism of Schopenhauer's opposition of genius to talent are, of course, potent enough to tempt us away entirely, in a fit of egalitarian or postmodern fervor, from any further examination of genius. One might consider whether there is no such thing as natural ability or distinctions of quality in the arts; quite possibly there exist only variations in the opportunity to pursue art, the educational context to appreciate it, or the professional slots to deploy interpretive frameworks. Certainly such variations have bearing on how we understand Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory, but nonetheless a third dimension of the distinction between genius and talent remains before us, that being whether the Schopenhauerian wedge between genius and talent can quite possibly be dissolved, leaving the opposition to collapse entirely.

2.4

Collapsing the genius-talent distinction altogether is precisely what Hannan does when she conflates scientific and aesthetic activity, or even conceptual and intuitive thinking. "When Schopenhauer speaks of genius," she notes, "his remarks are a curious combination of insight, error, and contradiction."²⁸ Among his errors is the denial of genius to scientists and mathematicians, which Hannan suggests is mistaken, since

²⁶ Hannan, *Riddle*, 115.

²⁷ Rudiger Safranski does a marvelous job speculating about Schopenhauer's snobbery and misogyny in light of his fraught relationship with his mother, Johanna Schopenhauer, a popular novelist of her day; Rudiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Similarly, in his fine intellectual tracing of Schopenhauer's life and work, Peter Lewis, in *Schopenhauer*, negotiates the uneven course of enduring material of merit and unfortunate impacts of personality.

²⁸ Hannan, *Riddle*, 115.

scientists classify things according to essential types and mathematicians strive to intuit something real beyond the visible world.

Furthermore, Hannan asserts,

the most apt anecdotes Schopenhauer offers about the nature of artistic geniuses . . . seem to apply equally well to scientific geniuses. Great scientists, like great artists, seem prone to intuitive leaps of insight²⁹ that come from the unconscious (e.g., the structure of the benzene ring came to August Kekulé in a dream; a dream was also the source of Dmitri Mendeleev's idea for the periodic table of elements).³⁰

I would suggest that Hannan's use of the term "genius" here begs the question of whether or not Schopenhauer's conception means something different than that of a talented practitioner of either science or practical life. She presumes "genius" as remarkable ability resulting in profound or frame-shifting insight rather than attending to Schopenhauer's own distinction between talent and genius. Most telling here is his brief discussion of how the genius, versus the man of talent, acts in a moment of emergency. For the genius,

[w]hen the bond between intellect and will is broken, intellect will . . . not be able to stop itself from grasping the picturesque aspect of an environment in which the individual is threatened with present danger. By contrast, the intellect belonging to the man of reason and understanding is always at its post, it is directed to the situation and its exigencies. (WWR 2, 404–405)

There is something beyond a difference of skill in the manner by which genius and talent deploy in action; there persists in Schopenhauer's thinking about them a differential emphasis of comportment, apprehension, and even portrayal of their experience for the world beyond themselves. Despite this, Hannan concludes, "Science, philosophy, and art, I believe, all have the same goal: to get at mind-independent reality. Geniuses are found not just among artists, but among scientists, philosophers, and mathematicians."³¹

²⁹ In relation to Hannan's assertions about great scientific discoveries appearing intuitively to great minds, I am grateful to Sean T. Murphy, whose prescient observations at the February 2020 meeting of the North American Division of the Schopenhauer Society drew my attention to a possibly insidious reversal of the epistemic chauvinism I remarked at the start of this essay. Murphy noted that, within scientific contexts, an intuitive or "brilliance chauvinism" similar to that described by Hannan (and bearing some kinship to Schopenhauer's conception of artistic inspiration) mythologizes contingent natural ability and flashes of creative insight over the methodical persistence that sits at the heart of most scientific discovery. Such mythologizing, Murphy notes, not only contravenes the actual processes behind the vast majority of scientific breakthroughs, but also discourages nascent mathematicians and scientists from persistence when struggling to achieve mastery.

³⁰ Hannan, *Riddle*, 116–117. ³¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

In light of this conclusion, this essay's effort to examine the distinction between talent and genius may amount to little more than logic-chopping or hairsplitting; perhaps, as Hannan suggests, art, science, and philosophy seek each the same goal. I see the merit of that conclusion, especially if read in a context that equates Schopenhauerian genius with either chauvinistic exclusivity (scientists, philosophers, and artists of merit all accomplish elite things and reach great heights) or a new age, metaphysical quest (scientists, philosophers, and artists are seized upon by dream-like, otherworldly insights, and funnel those into their output). I would argue, however, that Hannan's reasoning for collapsing the art–science or genius–talent distinction is too hasty – I will return to a discussion of philosophy's role in all this in section 3³² – and rests in part on a mistaken assumption about Schopenhauer's theory of genius – namely, that art can present us with mind-independent reality. There is ample evidence in WWR, some of which was discussed in the previous consideration of passive inspiration and active imagination, for the claim that Schopenhauer's art is constituted in part through an imaginative and a priori contribution by the artist to each specific instantiation of the Idea (e.g., WWR I, 247–249).³³ Furthermore, despite his emphatic commitment to genius's communication of the intuitively cognized Idea through creative productivity, Schopenhauer's insistence on the specificity, the particularity, of whatever is cognized separates art quite sharply from the pragmatic or generalized aims of science.

Admittedly, Hannan's very assertion that art shares a goal with science and even philosophy is complicated by the ambiguous meaning of the term "goal" in Schopenhauer's thinking. While in servitude to the will, for example, the ordinary intellect is entirely beholden to useful goals; only when released from them can the superfluity of intellect known as genius emerge.

The intellect is by its nature the mere medium of motives . . . it does not have enough energy to grasp the world in a purely objective manner using its own elasticity and *in the absence of a goal*. On the other hand, where this does take place, where the representational power of the brain has this surplus, and a pure, objective image of the external world is presented *in the absence of a goal*, an image that is useless, at higher levels even disruptive . . . then we find at least the foundation of that abnormality known as *genius*. (WWR 2, 393–394)

³² I began considering philosophy's unique position with respect to art and illumination under the first focal point of the essay (section 1), when discussing aesthetic pedagogy or critical communication.

³³ See also Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 29; John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 51.

On the one hand, then, Schopenhauer appears to anchor the emergence of genius as explicitly dependent on *the absence of a goal*, as his repeated italics emphasize; furthermore, “the productions of genius do not serve a useful goal” (WWR 2, 405). On the other, however, he does claim that genius’s only goal is to communicate the cognition of Ideas (WWR 1, 208) and that the genius sacrifices his personal welfare for an *objective* goal (WWR 1, 402), which is “to facilitate our grasp of the (Platonic) Ideas of the sense of this world” (WWR 2, 439). Through such facilitation “there is only one goal for all the arts, presentation of the Ideas” (WWR 1, 279).

To make any sense of this apparent paradox, “goal” in the vein of intentional, relational, or practical utility must be understood differently than “goal” as guided by unintentional, inspired, natural purpose: “knowledge of the Idea can be cognized only intuitively, and knowledge of the Idea is the goal of all art” (WWR 1, 269).

Such natural purpose for intuitive cognition in genius – both contemplative and productively communicative – has been explored in innovative ways by several scholars. Alex Neill offers a daring and original thesis concerning genius as neither an unnatural “glitch” in the evolutionary system nor a by-product of excess intellect in the individual, but rather as a manifestation and realization of Will’s motives through individuated intellect.³⁴ Sandra Shapshay finds Neill’s account too Hegelian in its reasoning, and instead advocates for the “spandrel” view of aesthetic activity, wherein it emerges as a nonadaptive side consequence of evolution.³⁵

Of course, Schopenhauer peppered many of his observations about genius, as well as the grades of the Will’s objectification in life, with the best science of his day, and, as we know, he retained a keen interest in medical matters throughout his life. The key thing to take away from the intersection of art and science in his thinking, however, is this: In citing scientific support for his claims about genius (such as the size and weight of Lord Byron’s brain, WWR 2, 410), Schopenhauer continues to think and write as an intuitively oriented philosopher or interpretive critic of artistic inspiration,³⁶ rather than an analytic apologist for his worldview, armed with arguments and data-driven, empirical studies. He does, however,

³⁴ Alex Neill, “Aesthetic Experience in Schopenhauer’s Metaphysics of Will,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 no. 2 (2008): 179–193.

³⁵ Sandra Shapshay, “Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art,” *Philosophy Compass* 7 no. 1 (2012): 16–17.

³⁶ Again, for an excellent treatment of Schopenhauer as drawing on poetic intuition in his own work, see Shapshay, “Poetic Intuition.”

retain the functional distinction between scientific processes and artistic ones, as well as scientific knowledge and artistic products.

[C]oncepts are like dead receptacles; what we place inside actually lies next to each other, and we cannot take out more (through analytic judgments) than we have put in (through synthetic reflection); . . . the Idea is like a living and developing organism endowed with generative powers, an organism that can produce things that were not already packaged up inside it. (WWR 1, 261)

Moreover, even today's medical practitioners recognize something very like the distinction. In "How Covid Sends Some Bodies to War with Themselves," a contemporary *New York Times Magazine* essay, Moises Velasquez-Manoff acknowledges both art and science within medicine: "The tension between the interpretive (or creative) and the conservative (or scientific), which is probably felt to some degree by every doctor, can escalate in times like the current moment."³⁷

Philosophers after Schopenhauer, Hannan notwithstanding, have also upheld the distinction. Bart Vandenabeele separates aesthetic cognition from science due to its nonordinary way of making intelligible insights that cannot be yielded empirically or through logic.

An aesthetic intuition does not in any way contribute to conceptual knowledge but isolates the perceived object from its merely empirical and practical connections by perceiving it as an ideal object. This kind of perception is particularly the work of the imagination and is a liberation from the limitations of the principle of sufficient reason that dominates logical reasoning.³⁸

Vasalou similarly catalogues many instances of epistemic difference between art or genius and scientific thinking, for "if we think we have any grip on Schopenhauer's understanding of epistemic privilege and the divide that constitutes it, abstract concepts would appear to fall squarely on the wrong side of this divide."³⁹ Koßler echoes Vasalou's observation, not only about the divide between intuition and conception, but also indicates the implications of the divide for art and science.

Schopenhauer compares two types of people: those who "usually stick to working with concepts" and others who "like to represent every-thing through imagination (Phantasie)." The former way is scientific thinking and is attributed to Kant. The latter is the way of the genius whose intuitive

³⁷ Moises Velasquez-Manoff, "How Covid Sends Some Bodies to War with Themselves," *New York Times Magazine*, August 11, 2020. <https://nyti.ms/3afDruT>.

³⁸ Bart Vandenabeele, "Schopenhauer on the Value of Aesthetic Experience," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 45 no. 4 (2007): 566–567.

³⁹ Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 58.

thinking is “really more thorough, more exhaustive, more universal and leads to discoveries.” Scientific thinking depends on the intuitive since “intuitions of imagination, however, are that to which all concepts must be traced back in order to have any value.”⁴⁰

This latter assertion that scientific thinking depends on, or issues from, the intuitive leads us back to Hannan’s earlier argument that great discoveries have appeared to scientists in their sleep, and raises once more the challenge of whether any abiding difference hangs over the domains of art and science, genius and talent, intuitive and conceptual cognition.

It might be argued that the examples Hannan offers are the exceptions that prove the rule – that when intuition plays a role in great scientific discoveries, intellect departs from the norm of scientific systematicity and indeed collapses into something like inspiration. But we must keep in mind that Hannan’s great discoverers *were asleep* when such ideas came to them, and that the phenomenology of intuiting an all-at-once sense of the benzene ring or the periodic table does, in fact, corroborate the foundational role of intuitive cognition, rooted in the unconscious or what Wharton calls “the sheer edge of consciousness,” as opposed to patient logical analysis or empirical collection.

Furthermore, the examples Hannan cites are both visual in nature: Schopenhauer not only emphasizes the power of image⁴¹ as central to intuitive cognition but also confessed that even mathematics could be undertaken in two ways, either intuitively through geometry’s spatial presentation or conceptually as Euclid’s axiomatic method (WWR 1, 95–96, 100–101, 130; WWR 2, 212).⁴² Poetry, at first glance entirely steeped in concepts, depends for its aesthetic power not on the conceptual meaning of words but rather on what those words in this order, in this pattern, *conjure*. As Schopenhauer observes, in poetry “the concept is the material, the immediately given, which we may very well leave behind in order to evoke something intuitive” (WWR 1, 267); “the abstract concepts (which are the immediate material of poetry just as they are the driest of prose) must be arranged in such a way that the pattern of intersection of their spheres ensures that no concept can persist in its abstract generality; instead an intuitive representative appears before the imagination ” (WWR 1, 269).⁴³

⁴⁰ Matthias Kößler, “The ‘Perfected System of Criticism’: Schopenhauer’s Initial Disagreements with Kant,” *Kantian Review* 17 no. 3 (2012): 463.

⁴¹ See, for example, the “enduring image” contrasted with fleeting practical reality at WWR 1, 257.

⁴² I am indebted to Alistair Welchman for reminding me of this distinction.

⁴³ Granted, immediately after this passage Schopenhauer compares poetic activity to that of chemistry in that each “distils out solid precipitates,” but there is little doubt that he intends the *how* of thinking – the arrangement and presentational qualities of cognition – to demarcate different kinds of thought processes and aims between aesthetic creativity and scientific reasoning.

Finally, in cases such as Hannan's dreams, in which solutions to puzzles appear to gifted scientists in a flash, science takes on the mantle of art rather than collapsing into it. This does not mean that scientific thinking or indeed science as a domain of practice or knowledge is customarily affiliated with such accounts. On the contrary, the very shape of a scientific paper follows a very rigid process of identifying a hypothesis, examining its context, setting up a method for its testing, gathering the data via testing, analyzing the data, assessing the hypothesis in light of it, and discussing the whole shebang in the very arid prose alluded to by Schopenhauer at WWR I, 269! A lot of thinking goes into both the design of such experiments as well as the justification for their necessity, but while on occasion a hypothesis may strike a scientist out of the blue much as the aesthetic apprehension (the Idea) may strike the artistic genius, few professional scientists in my acquaintance would confess either to such a start for their formal inquiries or to solutions for nagging problems reached in precisely this way. If they were so to confess, we may indeed be under the sway of a misleading narrative about the analytical and systematic nature of scientific inquiry. And, if so, scientific progress must credit far more of its advancement to aesthetic insight than to the methodical compilation of data.

Unlike Schopenhauer, fortunately, we need not place the achievements of art and science in hierarchical relation to, or competition with, each other. In fact, at his best, Schopenhauer avoids that very error, and instead presents the two types of cognition as directionally at odds, yet connected. In comparing scientific, analytic thinking, to artistic, intuitive thinking, Schopenhauer utilizes the heuristic – again – of spatial geometry (see Figure 4.1).

Pragmatic experience and scientific ways of thinking “can be compared to an infinite horizontal line” while artistic intuition “can be compared to a vertical line that bisects it at any given point” (WWR I, 208). Schopenhauer proceeds to liken the horizontal line to Aristotelian empiricism and a violent storm that drives onward with no starting point or goal, and the vertical to a Platonic way of regarding universal essentials, “a peaceful ray of sunlight that cuts through the path of this storm, completely unmoved by it” (WWR I, 208). They are then further analogized to a waterfall and a rainbow, and, at later points, to time and space, movement and stillness.

Atwell remarks “verticality” as the appropriate metaphor for aesthetic apprehension,⁴⁴ a moment that transects time in a sense of, if not spatial immersion as such, immersion in an awareness characterized by wonder,

⁴⁴ Atwell, *Character of the World*, 147.

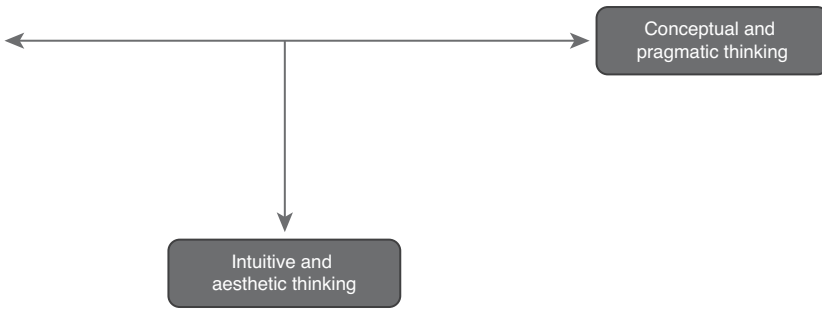


Figure 4.1 Axis of thinking

attention, and being, at times, transfixed. Vasalou calls this “the subterranean route” to apprehension,⁴⁵ a metaphor consistent with the implication that vertical thinking takes us below the surface of any impression. Schopenhauer likens art, “the blossom of life” and the formal progeny of aesthetic intuitions, to a camera obscura that sharpens and deepens the perception of reality, intensifying and magnifying for the purposes of sustained reflection (WWR 1, 295). Contra Hannan, then, the camera obscura of intuitive thinking and art does not seek to transcend mind-independent reality but to focus more sharply and precisely upon its presentational detail.

2.5

Despite Schopenhauer’s misogynistic, misguided assertions about the necessary association of intuitive cognition with male bodies, some current thinkers do not wish to pull aesthetic cognition away entirely from its roots in embodied observation as such. Daniel Schmicking, for instance, locates Schopenhauer among the great philosophers of the body, elaborating an account of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic cognition that not only places the possibility of aesthetic apprehension directly in the sensing subject but also, in relation to contemporary cognitive science, views “the body as dynamical system and explore[s] the active role the body plays in various fields of cognition, mainly perception but also the so-called higher functions of cognition.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 60.

⁴⁶ Daniel A Schmicking, “Schopenhauer on Unconscious Intelligence and Embodied Cognition,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24 no. 1 (2007): 90.

In that sense, Schopenhauer's somatic emphasis in describing some features of genius does appear to anticipate the integration of cognition and embodiment seen in more overtly phenomenological accounts of aesthetic apprehension that came after him. He contends that something special happens to the body, or rather to one's consciousness in and of an individuated body, in moments of aesthetic apprehension. The phenomenon of apprehension begins in the body, for our intuition is "mediated by a body whose affections constitute its starting point" (WWR 1, 198) but the genius is "given over to the things entirely . . . losing oneself in the object, forgetting all individuality, abolishing the mode of cognition that follows the principle of sufficient reason and grasps only relations" (WWR 1, 220). Metaphysically, Schopenhauer also asserts that one becomes the pure subject of knowing even as the object apprehended becomes the Idea, the pure essence of things. Here, however, my aim is less engaged with the peculiarities of apprehended Ideas and more, as it was in the first section of this essay, with teasing out what the moment of apprehension – the moment of artistic inspiration – *is actually like*.

Schopenhauer returns again and again to a sense of "losing" oneself in aesthetic apprehension, which has been much discussed in the scholarly literature, especially when analyzing the relationship between aesthetic loss of will and the more sustained ascetic quelling of willing altogether in oneself. It also shows up in contrast to the role of self-assertion when overcoming threats against the body or dramatization of will in experience of the sublime.⁴⁷ It is worth noting that Schopenhauer qualifies the use of "loss" of individuality as "a suggestive figure of speech" early on in his attempts to get at what happens to the artist in the moment of apprehension or inspiration (WWR 1, 201). In such moments, we are caught by attention to the What, rather than the Where, When, Why, or Wherefore of what lies before us, and immerse ourselves in attention to that What without the intrusion of instrumentality or analyticity. This is, of course, the very heart of intuitive cognition and marks out one of the crucial differences between aesthetic apprehension and critical assessment – intuitive cognition constitutes a "taking in" of patterns and perceptual features on their own terms without thinking of either their practical use or their conceptual meaning (at least not at first).

⁴⁷ See, for example, Paul Guyer, "Back to Truth: Knowledge and Pleasure in the Aesthetics of Schopenhauer," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 no 2 (2008): 171; Neill, *Aesthetic Experience*, 181; Vandenabeele, "Value of Aesthetic Experience," 31; Vandenabeele, "Objectivity of Art," 223.

Here is an example of highly developed intuitive cognition spilling over into a productive work of literary art that shows, rather than describes, a slice of the world – once again from Edith Wharton.

In an article by an American literary critic, I saw “Ethan Frome” cited as an interesting example of a successful New England Story written by someone who knew nothing of New England! “Ethan Frome” was written after I had spent ten years in the hill-region where the scene is laid, during which years I had come to know well the aspect, the dialect, and mental and moral attitude of the hill people.⁴⁸

Edith Wharton “knew nothing” of New England in the sense that she did not research the culture or ways of those she wrote of; raised in New York City and Europe, she was a cultivated, if, when young, a sheltered woman who spoke several languages, read extensively, travelled widely, hailed from an old money family who had lost a bit along the way then inherited back a bit more, and owned more than one exquisite home that some of us might call mansions.

Life as Wharton lived it prior to the Berkshires was quite far removed from the day-to-day struggles of those in the impoverished, bleakly wooded, backroads sticks of Massachusetts. Yet, Wharton was able, through that porous receptivity of hers, to configure a story of such authenticity and depth, that it remains, nearly 100 years later, a hallmark of regional American literature in its illumination of a dour Yankee landscape haunted by impoverished integrity. Note my stress, again, on configuring and illumination – metaphors of seeing, light, illumination, rather than explications of description, analysis, reason.

Ethan Frome brought Wharton “the greatest joy and the fullest ease,” and as she said, “[f]or years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose-colored spectacles of my predecessors.”⁴⁹ In expressing her desire to draw life as it really was, however, Wharton echoes her favored WWR and the thinking of Schopenhauer as well: she portrays rather than tells, draws rather than describes, unveils what really is, presentationally, rather than analyzing factual features.

The “reality” posited by Wharton is no mere demographic cataloguing of mountain-people features, nor was it meant to be a sociological study of poverty stuck in the hills. Instead, the reality Wharton conjures is that

⁴⁸ Wharton, *Backwards Glance*, 296. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

beyond the scope of empirical instrumentation or uninflected description, namely, the aesthetic impress of life in a stark situation. Perceiving the objective perceptual elements illuminates different aspects of life that

are demonstrated in the qualities, passions, errors and strengths of the human race; in selfishness, hatred, love, fear, courage, frivolity, stupidity, slyness, wit, genius, etc., all of which, converging and coalescing in a thousand different shapes (individual), ceaselessly stage the history of the world in those small and large scale, so that it is very much the same whether it was set in motion by matches or by crowns. (WWR 1, 206)

Schopenhauer readily admits here that the subject matters little in art, for aspects of reality, glimpses of the universal in the particular, can be found any and everywhere, no matter how socially or naturally insignificant. In this, at least, he is no snob. From political life, for example, the artist may see that “this particular thing, which played such a vanishingly small role in that current of worldly affairs, becomes for art representative of a whole” (WWR 1: 208). The genius shows us precise and specific manifestations of the Idea in the world, representationally, in an act of imagistic unveiling or, in the case of music, direct and unfettered expression.

3 Coda

What, then, are we to conclude from all this? Certainly that it is precipitate to collapse the distinction between genius and talent, even in light of the benzene dream Hannan invokes to make her case. As Schopenhauer’s own manner of practicing philosophy demonstrates, intuitive insights are powerful vectors for shifting perspective all in one go, requiring neither elaborate axioms nor erudite allusion, and at times the aspect of reality about which such shifts are made does not lend itself to the cold hard dictates of reason or pragmatic commerce. We might say, modifying Shakespeare much as Schopenhauer modifies Leibniz (WWR 1, 292), *there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your science and practical reasoning*.

When science does dream, it aims at the insights of art. Intuitive cognition, therefore, described so well by Schopenhauer’s account of artistic inspiration and illustrated palpably by Wharton’s autobiographical reflections, does differ ontologically and phenomenologically from the systematic deployment of reason and evidence that we expect to see in the conceptual cognition of science or pragmatic reasoning. Perhaps

we might modify Hannan's proposed collapse of talent and genius after all, preserving their distinction but refusing to stack them hierarchically in relation to each other, as Schopenhauer does for ridiculous and sometimes bigoted reasons, and as do some of today's plutocratic or scientistic presumptions about measurable ability (and value).⁵⁰ Refusing to rank cognitive comportments may prevent us from the folly of devaluing artistic ability, for only if we acknowledge the existence of individuals with a capacity for intuitive insight – in art, but also in other human endeavors – can we support and cultivate it. It is no violation of democratic equality to acknowledge differential abilities within the rich range of activities and skills; the moral weakness rests, instead, with the failure to recognize and honor individual capacities when we see them.

If we see them, that is. And surely that is part of Schopenhauer's merit as a thinker, laboring as he does at the translational interface between art and philosophy, an interface where he often functions intuitively even as he examines aesthetic intuitions through concepts. Why devote philosophical intentionality to such an interface? Because, as Schopenhauer himself suggests, and Vasalou reminds us, neglect of intuition or knowledge through perception is often the root of philosophical dogmatism.⁵¹ When we are dogmatic about what "counts" as philosophically relevant, or worse still, what "counts" as an acceptable method of doing philosophy, we shred every beautiful insight on the rasp of reductive reasoning.

⁵⁰ Schopenhauer recognized the tendency of society at large to value the "greater skill and acuity of discursive cognition" rather than intuitive cognition (WWR 2, 393). Today in the United States we see this in the emphasis, in public schools and college admission, on timed, multiple choice, reasoning-based exams. A failure to recognize the cognitive dimension of artistic activity results in the educational occlusion of creative thinking.

⁵¹ Vasalou, *Aesthetic Standpoint*, 60.

Experiencing Character as a Key for a Present-Day Interpretation of Schopenhauer

Matthias Kößler

I Introduction

Even if in the past few decades the concept of character has enjoyed a revival in psychology, education, politics, jurisprudence and philology¹, there are some difficulties in attempting to reintroduce it into philosophical debate. First of all, recent discussions concerning the anthropological, ethical and social significance of individual behavior refrain from using this concept. In the Anglophone world in particular, it is replaced by the concept of personality. Fields that are still called “*Charakterforschung*” or “*Charaktertypologie*” in German are referred to as “personality diagnosis” and “typology of personality,” respectively, in English. Second, in Germany the concept of character fell into disrepute because the “*Charakterologien*” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries² reduced it to essential qualities of individuals that could be discovered by psychological observation or even by physiognomic features. Even though Julius Bahnsen,³ the founder of characterology as a science referred to Schopenhauer, the latter’s conception of character (and in a way that of Bahnsen himself) differs, as we will see, from such a simple idea. The third disadvantage of using the term “character” seems to be its ambiguity since it does not only mean the individual nature of a human being but also a typical figure in a drama, the quality of things and events and, not least, a sign or letter. However, in philosophy, the ambiguity of a concept is not a disadvantage per se, but can in fact provide a heuristic tool if it is able to illuminate the relations between the different meanings. In the following I try

¹ Cf. William Damon, *Bringing in a New Era in Character Education* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002); James Q. Wilson, *On Character* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 1995); John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Aaron Kunin, *Character as Form* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

² Cf. Ludwig Klages, *Die Grundlagen der Charakterkunde*, 14th ed. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969 [Leipzig, 1928]) and *Handschrift und Charakter* (Leipzig: Barth, 1917).

³ Julius Bahnsen, *Beiträge zur Charakterologie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1867).

to show that Schopenhauer's theory of character, based on the Kantian distinction between intelligible and empirical character, can, in this sense, contribute to the discussion of some philosophical and ethical problems.

In several essays,⁴ I have shown that Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will developed from his original conception of character presented in his 1813 dissertation, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (first edition). This historical observation corresponds to the methodological approach that Schopenhauer had already announced in a note from 1816 as his "revolutionary principle":

from the way in which the motive moves your will, you should understand how the cause moves the effect, from your body's (*vulgo* arbitrary) movements ensuing on motives those that result without motive (organic, vegetative), from these living nature, chemism, mechanism, and from the action of the motive the action of the cause, thus the mediated from the immediate, the remote from the near, the imperfect from the perfect, the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself, from the will . . . From yourself you shall understand nature, not yourself from nature. This is my revolutionary principle (MR I, 465–66).⁵

As a result of the methodological priority of character, Schopenhauer's metaphysics is rightly described as a hermeneutic theory of the "character of the world"⁶ in the sense that it interprets the world as representation in relation to the "will" (as a key to its comprehensibility) according to the relation of our voluntary actions to our individual will, that is, our character, in self-consciousness. In the present essay, I do not discuss the metaphysics of will further but remain with the prior question of self-consciousness as experience of character. I will refer mainly to the first edition of the *World as Will and Representation* and to the dissertation that Schopenhauer regards as an essential part of the first book in his preface (WWR I, 7). Here, as well, the development of Schopenhauer's theory of character becomes evident.

⁴ Cf., for example, Matthias Koßler, "Life Is but a Mirror: On the Connection between Ethics, Metaphysics and Character in Schopenhauer," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16/2 (2008): 230–50; "Die Welt als inintelligibler und empirischer Charakter," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 97 (2016): 93–103.

⁵ Original in German: "aus der Art wie das Motiv deinen Willen bewegt, sollst du verstehn wie die Ursache die Wirkung bewegt aus den auf Motiven erfolgenden (*vulgo* willkürlichen) Bewegungen deines Leibes die ohne Motive erfolgenden (*organischen, vegetativen*) aus diesen die lebende Natur, den Chemismus, den Mechanismus und aus dem Wirken des Motivs das Wirken der Ursach: Also aus dem Unmittelbaren das Mittelbare, aus dem Nahen das Ferne, aus dem Vollkommenen das Unvollkommene, aus dem Ding an sich, dem Willen, die Erscheinung . . . Aus dir sollst du die Natur verstehen, nicht dich aus der Natur. Das ist mein revolutionaires Princip" (HN I, 420 f.).

⁶ Cf. John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

2 Schopenhauer's Theory of Character

In the 1813 dissertation, character is introduced as “a permanent state” of the subject of willing, which we “assume” (FR, 187) in order to apply the principle of sufficient reason to human action. It is important to note that Schopenhauer does not at first talk about a cognition or experience of character, but of character as something we have to suppose as a condition of the law of motivation. In the first edition of the *Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, motivation is an autonomous form of the principle of sufficient reason (in the later editions and in the main work motivation is subsumed under the principle of causality). The class of objects underlying the “principle of sufficient reason of acting” (FR, 186) consists of only one object: the subject of willing, and, Schopenhauer adds, “and even . . . with a significant restriction” (FR, 133).⁷ What is meant by this “restriction” is explained a few pages later. It is the fact that the subject of will as such is not an immediate object in our experience and in empirical cognition. What we perceive by the “inner sense” is merely single “acts of will” (FR, 187). Acts of will are movements, which are not explainable by the law of causality since they include a moment of decision and this is something that does not result from the modification of a state of things as is the case with causal events. Decisions can either be viewed as entirely by chance or as expected. In the first case, there would be no law of motivation at all. The question “why” an action happened would be senseless. If we think that we are justified in asking why an action happened – and this is the case, especially in moral questions – then we must suppose a permanent state of the subject of willing, that is, a character from which decisions can be derived according to a rule. Therefore, a constant character is, in this first step of the argument, not an empirical fact but an assumption made in order for (moral) actions to be understandable. In the later writings, this first step is hidden by a tendency to naturalization, but we will try to show that it remains the basis of Schopenhauer's immanent approach to metaphysics.

Schopenhauer does not stay with this first approach. But, even if in his mature philosophy he no longer talks of assumptions or suppositions, he emphasizes that the will “becomes known to the individual only in its separate acts, not as a whole” (WWR I, 134). In the dissertation, Schopenhauer is looking for empirical support for the assumption of

⁷ Original in German: “und auch da noch, wie wir sehn werden, mit einer bedeutenden Einschränkung” (SW 7). Cartwright translates “Einschränkung” as “qualification.” I prefer the more literal “restriction,” regarding the status of character as it is explained in the following.

character. Before we proceed to this next step, we should note that the assumption of character is not a kind of hypothesis in the sense that a particular character is supposed, which can be proved by empirical observation. The assumption concerns only the subject of willing as the unity of acts of willing. Thus, it is a precondition of ascribing actions to a person that she has the capability to have or to be a character. Empirical observation shows “that given the same observable motives, one person acts in one way, another in another way; however, the same person, given exactly the same circumstances, acts in exactly the same way” (FR, 187). By observing the behavior of individuals in that way the abstract and general possibility of being a character becomes a concrete and individual character. Referring to Kant’s distinction, Schopenhauer calls the latter the “empirical character” while for the subject as indefinite unity of acts of willing he uses the expression “intelligible character” (FR, 187f.).

Regarding the expression “intelligible character” Schopenhauer adds, in brackets, “perhaps it would more correctly be called unintelligible.” This note is very instructive for understanding not only the theory of character but the entire metaphysics of will, since it makes clear that Schopenhauer refuses any cognition that is not empirically grounded. Therefore, the intelligible character can never be an immediate object of cognition: it is unintelligible and strictly speaking should not be called “intelligible” as in Kant, according to whom we can have an “intellectual concept” of it as “noumenon.”⁸ In Schopenhauer, concepts must be derived from intuitive knowledge, and so one can approach the “unintelligible character” only in reference to the empirical. Already, in the dissertation, this approach is conceived as a kind of hermeneutical procedure: “Since these expressions of a person’s empirical character are each separate, but *indicate* unity and inalterability of character, it *must be thought of as* the appearance of a permanent state, as it were, of the subject of the will, lying outside of time, which absolutely never can be cognized” (FR, 187).⁹ In Schopenhauer’s later metaphysics the “will” as thing-in-itself is unintelligible in the same way, and can only be thought of as something to which the manifold empirical appearances point as a unity, by which we are able to interpret the world.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A538/B566, A541/B569.

⁹ My own emphases and slight modification of the translation. The original German reads: “*Da diese Äußerungen des empirischen Charakters zerstückelt sind, aber auf Einheit und Unveränderlichkeit desselben deuten, muß er als Erscheinung eines gar nicht erkennbaren, außer der Zeit liegenden gleichsam permanenten Zustandes des Subjekts des Willens gedacht werden*” (SW 7, 76).

To sum up the first appearance of character in Schopenhauer's work, one can say that character is neither an empirical fact nor a metaphysical entity in the sense that there is an *a priori* given or inborn specific nature of an individual that comes into appearance by certain behavior. Rather, on the basis of the assumption of a mere unity of voluntary acts (the unintelligible character), we can infer empirical character from the observation of different modes of acting on motives. Schopenhauer emphasizes that "perfect knowledge of the empirical character . . . is impossible" (FR, 188). Now, one may think that the later conception of character was modified by the development of the metaphysics of will since in the mature work the intelligible character is identified with the "Idea" (WWR 1, 157) of an individual human being and is thus a metaphysical entity. However, we should bear in mind that the "revolutionary principle" which constitutes Schopenhauer's metaphysics is just the way we understand actions in reference to a character. When, much later in the prize essay *On the Freedom of the Will*, Schopenhauer writes, "*freedom resides in the esse alone; but from it and the motives the operari follows with necessity; and in what we do, we come to know what we are*" (FW, 108f.), one should be aware that even if the *esse* is logically prior it is nothing more than what we do. The *esse* or the unintelligible character "is" only in so far as it is proved by its *operari*. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, empirical observation is the criterion for the validity of metaphysical assumptions and not vice versa. Character is essentially experienced character.

Of course, in the mature philosophy, this point is often obscured by dogmatic expressions such as when, for example, Schopenhauer writes that the empirical character of a human individual "is revealed in the way he acts, but intelligible character, the will in itself whose determinate appearance he is, is revealed in turn in the empirical character" (WWR 1, 313–14).¹⁰ Such a formulation gives the impression of the intelligible character as a metaphysical substance which could just as well exist without its revelation. But we reach a different conclusion if we take seriously the way in which Schopenhauer arrived at what he calls "the will in itself." According to the "revolutionary principle" as cited above, the "will" is discovered as the key to interpret the manifold phenomena of empirical reality. Once the dependence of the metaphysical will on experience is explained, Schopenhauer feels free to use expressions from traditional metaphysics like "thing in itself" or "idea" without always pointing to

¹⁰ Original in German: "In dieser Handlungsweise selbst offenbart sich sein empirischer Charakter, in diesem aber wieder sein intelligibler Charakter, der Wille an sich, dessen determinirte Erscheinung er ist" (SW 2, 339).

the specificity of his “immanent” metaphysics (WWR 2, 192). In the *Parerga and Paralipomena* he even calls his philosophy “an *immanent dogmatism*, for its theorems are indeed dogmatic, yet do not go beyond the world given in experience” (PP 1, 119).¹¹ We will not dwell further on the general methodological problematic of Schopenhauer’s immanent metaphysics¹² but return to its particular form in the theory of character. As already mentioned at the beginning of the essay, the analysis of character is crucial for a general understanding of the method since, by analogy, the relation between bodily actions and acts of will is the “key to the essence of every appearance in nature” (WWR 1, 129).

In the first edition of the *World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer gives a more detailed explanation of the empirical character and adds a new dimension with the concept of the “acquired character.” At first glance, the introduction of the acquired character is confusing rather than illuminating. Until now, the empirical character had been the general manner of a person’s acting insofar as it is inferred from the observation of actions and motives in reference to a permanent state of the subject of will, the constant “intelligible character.” One would think that character and manner of acting could not differ anyway, since we have nothing but the latter to infer the former from. But in his main work Schopenhauer states that “someone’s way of acting can be visibly altered without warranting the conclusion that this character itself has altered” (WWR 1, 320). The apparent contradiction between an unalterable character and alteration of acting is clarified by the impact that cognition has on the empirical character, since “the motives that determine the appearance of character, or action, influence it through the medium of cognition: but cognition is changeable” (WWR 1, 320). In the dissertation, the role of cognition in the formation of character was only touched on by referring to the difference between a man’s objective circumstances and the judgments that he makes about them (FR, 188). However, the influence of cognition is more far-reaching. Reflection and deliberation do not concern only the assessment of a situation but the nature of the human will itself.

Cognition can have such an influence on character only in the presence of thoughtfulness (*Besonnenheit*),¹³ which is a capacity distinctive to human

¹¹ Cf. Maria Lúcia Cacciola, “Immanenter Dogmatismus,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 93 (2012): 151–61.

¹² For an overview of the recent approaches cf. Jens Lemanski and Daniel Schubbe, “Konzeptionelle Probleme und Interpretationsansätze der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung,” in Daniel Schubbe and Matthias Kößler, eds., *Schopenhauer-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2018), 43–51.

¹³ The translation of “*Besonnenheit*” into English is very difficult and always dissatisfying. It means consideration, reflection, awareness, moderation, level-headedness, composure, and more. Cf. the

beings and lacking in animals. Through thoughtfulness people are able to delay the effect of a motive even if their character is receptive to it. In such a case there is a “*velleitas*” (FW, 63) or “stirring of the will” (WWR I, 291) but it does not immediately result in an action. Here, Schopenhauer’s differentiation between will and wish (*Wunsch*) becomes important. Already, in the dissertation, he had defined wish as “willing as long as it has not become causal” (FR, 185). After he abandoned causality of the will in the course of the development of the metaphysics of will, the empirical fact of the deed is the criterion for an act of will, in contrast to a wish. “For as long as it is in the process of becoming it is called a *wish*; when ready, a *decision*; but its being this is proven to self-consciousness only by the *deed*; for until that it is alterable”: what one wills “even to self-consciousness only the *deed* first reveals” (FW, 42).¹⁴ The way from wish to deed is specified in the late *On the Freedom of Will*, but it is already at the root of the complications that the theory of character undergoes in the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation*.

Anything that occurs either in outer experience or in the mind can stir the will, cause a wish. In human beings, owing to reason as the faculty of building concepts and thus representations of things independent of their real presence, there are normally several such possible motives in mind. While those different wishes can coexist in the mind, only the one that shows up in the deed reveals the will. The transition from wish to decision requires deliberation over possible motives, and only after deliberation is the deed a valid sign of the individual character: “It is only after a choice has been made that the resulting decisions, which vary from individual to individual, become a sign of individual character” (WWR I, 326). By contrast, if deliberation does not take place and the arousal of the will immediately leads to an action, the latter does not reveal the true character because a stronger motive could have caused a different action if only the individual had been aware of it.

Schopenhauer concludes from this that the wish “only expresses the character of the species, as in animals, and not the individual character, i.e. it merely indicates what a *human being in general*, not the *individual* feeling the wish, would be able to do” (WWR I, 326).¹⁵ This conclusion is not quite

translator’s introduction to Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, Vol. II, trans. Richard Aquila and David Carus (Boston, MA: Prentice, 2011), xii.

¹⁴ Original in German: “Denn so lange er im Werden begriffen ist, heißt er Wunsch, wenn fertig, Entschluß; daß er aber dies sei, beweist dem Selbstbewußtsein selbst erst die That: denn bis zu ihr ist er veränderlich” (SW 4, 17).

¹⁵ The translation is slightly modified, original in German: “daher drückt er ... bloß den Gattungscharakter aus, nicht den individuellen, d. h. deutet bloß an, was der Mensch überhaupt, nicht was das den Wunsch fühlende Individuum zu thun fähig wäre” (SW 2, 354).

convincing. Even if it is appropriate to say that an impulsive act is a less reliable sign of one's character than a carefully considered act, it does not follow from this that it expresses the character of the human species. For instance, if someone exposed to a danger runs away without any reflection, why should this indicate the character of the species? Isn't it, on the contrary, a trait of an individual character to lose control in dangerous situations while other human beings do not? So it cannot be the case that the wish expresses the character of the human species because it is "as immediately necessary and lacking in deliberation [*ohne Überlegung*]" as the act of an animal" (WWR 1, 326). Nevertheless, Schopenhauer compares the character of the human species with that of animals, which have almost exclusively the character of their species that can be derived from motives that are "intuitively available [*anschaulich vorliegend*]" (WWR 1, 324). According to the terminology developed in the dissertation, the character of the species is the empirical character of an animal. But in complete contrast to this derivation of the character of the species of animals, the character of the human species is located in the wish, which is not accessible to observation from the outside. We will refer to this point later in this section.

The complications introduced by the notion of wishing changes the meaning of "empirical character." In the dissertation there was a difference only between (un)intelligible character as the timeless and unchangeable essence of an individual, and its appearance in time and space. Now, a further difference is introduced, namely, between the empirical and the "acquired character" (WWR 1, 329). The empirical character is now defined as "a simple drive of nature [*bloßer Naturtrieb*]," which is "intrinsically irrational" (WWR 1, 330), while the acquired character is rational. It is not only surprising that the empirical character itself becomes a drive but that the character of the human species, which up to now seemed unified by the lack of deliberation in wishing, is on the contrary a result of thoughtfulness:

in fact, reason interferes with how it [the empirical character] expresses itself, and its interference is proportionate to the thoughtfulness and intelligence [*Denkkraft*] of the person involved. This is because these rational qualities show him and even reproach him with what is appropriate for *a human being in general*, as a species character, and what is possible in willing and doing. (WWR 1, 330)¹⁶

¹⁶ The translation is slightly modified, original in German: "ja, seine Aeußerungen werden noch dazu durch die Vernunft gestört, und zwar um so mehr, je mehr Besonnenheit und Denkkraft der Mensch hat. Denn diese halten ihm immer vor, was dem Menschen überhaupt, als Gattungscharakter, zukommt und im Willen, wie im Leisten, demselben möglich ist" (SW 2, 357–58).

With this change in the explanation of a “human being in general,” the character of the human species becomes clearer. It is not, as Schopenhauer puts it later in the prize essay, a set of “chief properties” (FW 43) which are common to all human beings, but the infinite field of possible motives present as wishes: in other words, the epitome of all the possibilities to be an individual character. A person “finds in himself dispositions for all the many human aspirations and abilities; but without experience, he is not aware of their various degrees in his individuality” (WWR I, 330).¹⁷

Thus, the experience of character seems to be the development from the character of the human species as it is explained above, to the specific individual character. In the beginning we “act like children at a fair, grabbing at everything that tickles our fancy in passing” (WWR I, 330),¹⁸ that is, we act on wishes without deliberation. But in the course of life we note that after deliberation we should act differently, in accordance with different motives, which have a stronger effect on our will. Little by little, we learn in this way to know our real individual character and in the end “achieve what the world calls character, the *acquired character*” (WWR I, 331). “Remorse [*Reue*]” (WWR I, 322) is placed in this context. According to Schopenhauer, remorse has no moral significance. It arises from the insight that I did something other than what was in accordance with my character.

This conception, according to which a person without self-cognition or deliberation “despite the natural consistency of the empirical character . . . will not set off on a straight line but rather take a shaky, crooked line, deviating, wavering, turning back, and setting himself up for pain and remorse” (WWR I, 330–31), conflicts with the claim to be an immanent philosophy. As we have seen, the empirical character can only be inferred from actions appearing in outer experience and thus cannot deviate from them. If an action occurs which does not fit with the established character, the interpretation must change in such a way that it affords us a unity of all actions, including the one in question. With the description of empirical character as a “drive of nature” Schopenhauer gives the impression that it could be grasped independent of appearances as a “straight line,” while observation offers a shaky, unsteady one. The expression “drive of nature [*Naturtrieb*]” shows that he is conceiving character in analogy to natural

¹⁷ The translation is modified, original in German: “*Er findet in sich zu allen, noch so verschiedenen menschlichen Anstrengungen und Kräften die Anlagen; aber der verschiedene Grad derselben in seiner Individualität wird ihm nicht ohne Erfahrung klar*” (SW 2, 358).

¹⁸ The translation is modified, original in German: “*greifen, wie die Kinder auf dem Jahrmakkt, nach allem, was uns im Vorübergehn reizt*” (SW 2, 358).

forces. Science discovers laws of nature taking natural forces as a basis for their causality so that the character of these forces always follows a straight line. Similarly, human character as a natural drive should be steady, and only the fact that causality here is mediated by cognition makes its actions deviate from a straight line. But this description is a reversal of the “revolutionary principle”: Instead of understanding nature starting from oneself it takes the reverse way and explains the self from natural forces.¹⁹

However, in Schopenhauer there are some grounds for another interpretation. In one of his numerous pictures he compares the relation between the character of the species and the individual character with the relation between surface and line. “Just as our physical path on earth is always a line and never a plane, similarly, when we want to accomplish and possess one thing in life, we need to give up countless other things, right and left, and leave them undone” (WWR 1, 330).²⁰ To try to grab everything, stirring our will, “would be a wrong-headed attempt to change our line into a plane” (WWR 1, 330). In this picture, the character of the species is not a starting point but rather the possibility of being any kind of human being, and thus the background on which alone an individual character can emerge. As quoted above, the individual character is formed by the “degree” the various human endeavors attain in relation to each other. From this point of view, every individual character is a particular realization of the character of the human species or of humankind. And the “zigzag” (WWR 1, 330) course of our path is not a deviation from a presupposed straight line, but part of the individual character inasmuch as the latter is a realization of the character of the species.

Drawing these conclusions from Schopenhauer’s basic thoughts about character and wish, one must say that the acquired character is more than just “what people have in mind when they praise someone as a man of character or censure him as characterless” (WWR 1, 329). We can distinguish here between two senses in which Schopenhauer uses the expression “character”: In the first sense, as it is developed in terms of intelligible and empirical character, everybody has a character insofar as they act in a certain way, whether the character be a steady or an unsteady one. A lack of character in this sense is only to be found in the case of denial of will, when it is “fully abolished by the alteration in cognition”

¹⁹ Note that this way around self, that is, character, would be an “occult quality” (WWR 1, 106f.) like any natural force.

²⁰ Original in German: “Denn, wie unser physischer Weg auf der Erde immer nur eine Linie, keine Fläche ist; so müssen wir im Leben, wenn wir Eines ergreifen und besitzen wollen, unzähliges Anderes, rechts und links, entsagend, liegen lassen” (SW 2, 358).

(WWR I, 431). In the second sense, to have a character means to know one's own individual character and to act with self-confidence according to this "abstract and therefore clear knowledge of the invariable qualities of our own empirical character" (WWR I, 331). Acquired character, then, is a knowledge added to an already defined individual empirical character so that we can "organize the unalterable role of our own person in a thoughtful and methodical manner" (WWR I, 331). Character in this sense is restricted to a few, and when we speak about someone who lacks character we merely say that she or he lacks particularity, firmness and stability in his or her acting. Of course, in our essay we are not dealing with this popular use of the expression "character" but with its meaning as explained above.

Thus, thoughtfulness or reason is much more deeply connected with the human character. As we have seen, it is the faculty that keeps us apprised of what pertains to a human being in general, and thereby enables the development of individuality. If we take the acquired character terminologically as it is introduced in contrast to the empirical character, any human character must be called an acquired character since "people are generally in control of their reason, which is to say they are thoughtful, i.e. make decisions according to well-considered, abstract motives" (WWR I, 327). In contrast to the empirical character of animals, human character is so fundamentally connected with reason and self-reflection that a human action "always requires a certain amount of deliberation" (WWR I, 326), otherwise it would not be a genuine human action.

Even if we think that this interpretation of the role of reason in human character follows logically from Schopenhauer's conception, we do not want to withhold the fact that he himself plays down the difference between rational human character and character in the rest of nature. In the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation* as well as in the lectures he delivered in 1820 at the University of Berlin, he discusses the problem of freedom of the will starting from causality in inorganic nature. The passage is replaced in later editions by a reference to the prize essay, *On the Freedom of Will*. As we will see in section 3, the discussion in the prize essay is more problematic by formal reason, namely, because there Schopenhauer could not refer to his metaphysics.

The passage is to be found more or less at the beginning of the section which is later headed §55 (see WWR I, 316). The subject is freedom of the will, which Schopenhauer locates in the will as thing-in-itself, that is, in the human intelligible character, while the empirical character is determined by the law of motivation. He compares causality in the case of a burning

body with motivation in human acting by reference to inner and outer ability. A body's inner ability to burn is its chemical quality (related to oxygen); the outer ability consists in the environmental conditions (oxygen and temperature). If both are given, the body must burn. Schopenhauer claims that the same structure holds with human actions: The inner ability of a given action is the person's character, while the outer ability is the constellation of the person's motives. According to the strongest motive he must act by the same necessity as the body must burn, even if we are talking about willing. The illusion of free will in the sense of a choice between different actions under the same circumstances, that is, of a *liberum arbitrium indifferetiae*, occurs in those "who judge unphilosophically" because they "are attached to the abstract concept *human being* . . . So they subsume the individual under that concept and transfer what holds of a human being in general . . . to the individual, and ascribe to him a choice as yet undetermined by anything (*liberum arbitrium indifferetiae*)" (WWR I, 582).

In this passage, "human being in general" refers to the concept "human being" formed by abstracting away individual qualities and keeping the chief properties of the species human being. However, we have shown that this is not the meaning of the expression "human being in general" as it is used in Schopenhauer's explanation of character. In an abstract concept of human being we would not get very many "chief properties" at all. Common to all human beings are strictly speaking only qualities they share with other living beings, like vegetative functions and animal instincts. Such qualities do not express what is specific to human beings since individuality is essential to the latter. Any human being is an individual realization of human being in general, in the sense discussed above.

Schopenhauer justifies the parallel between causality in inorganic nature and motivation with the claim that motivation is "only causality that has passed through cognition or causality mediated by cognition" (WWR I, 581). We intend neither to reject this claim nor to deny the necessity of acting according to the strongest motive. We differ merely in the assessment of the consequences of that mediation in the case of motivation in human beings, that is, by concepts. Animals are motivated by perceptual representations which can be observed by us easily because they have to be present and thus are few in number. The animal's empirical character is inferred by us, within our reflection, and not in the cognition of the animal itself. The mediation of causality by cognition in animals is restricted to the fact that a cause as a representation does not have to be in bodily contact with them as is the case in inorganic or vegetative processes.

So it can be said that in the case of animals, the mediation by cognition makes no significant deviation from causality. But it is a different matter with human beings. A human being “is at pains to exclude this sort of motivation [as in animals] altogether, to allow himself to be determined only by abstract representations” (WWR I, 325). Due to their independence of temporality and their communicability, abstract representations cover the whole world of representation so that anything in the world can be a motive for a human being, without it being apparent to us. On the other hand, reason is a condition of self-cognition. While animals are not able to reflect on their actions, human beings generally know their own character, and this knowledge modifies their acting, as we have seen in the discussion of acquired character. This is the reason why, even if we assume that our character is constant, “we should strive and struggle in time so that the image we create through our deeds will be a source of reassurance rather than concern, to the fullest extent possible” (WWR I, 329).²¹ As a result, human character cannot be inferred in the manner of a semi-experimental procedure as is the case with other qualities and characters in nature. We ascribe a specific character to someone by very uncertain and indefinite indications because we have an insight neither into their inner nor their outer ability to act, in contrast with a burnable body and its contact with oxygen and high temperature. When in his *Parerga and Paralipomena* Schopenhauer writes that “one can obtain a correct Knowledge of someone’s character from one characteristic deed, thereby constructing him to a certain extent even when this deed concerns something minor and perhaps then even the best” (PP 2, 209),²² another kind of cognition of the character is intimated, which we will investigate in section 3.

²¹ This is the point where a special kind of compatibilism in Schopenhauer’s theory of character becomes evident. Cf. Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135. Shapshay rightly traces this compatibilism back to Kant’s third Antinomy. According to her, Schopenhauer “excises the rational-spontaneous causal story from his overall Kantian picture, putting nothing else in its place” in order to elucidate the “mystery” of transcendental freedom. I hope to show here that the compatibility of a constant character with freedom is not at all mysterious if one draws conclusions from Schopenhauer’s account of experiencing character. Incidentally, I don’t think that Schopenhauer’s compatibilism undergoes a “significant development” (Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 136), from the dissertation to the mature view, since already in the dissertation he begins to turn away from Kant’s causality through freedom by his comparison of the law of motivation with “the optical law that governs the way a light ray affects a coloured body” (FW, 189).

²² The translation is slightly modified, original in German: “so kann man aus Einer charakteristischen Handlung eines Menschen eine richtige Kenntniß seines Charakters erlangen, also in gewissermaßen daraus konstruieren; sogar auch wenn diese Handlung eine Kleinigkeit betrifft; ja, dann oft am besten” (SW 6, 245).

As a result, we have no cognition of a constant human character since a person's manner of action can always "become markedly altered," in contrast to animals, who act constantly and predictably according to their character of species. That does not contradict the assumption of an unalterable character, though not as empirical but as unintelligible character. The formula "*operari sequitur esse*" (FW, 108) can be maintained with the caveat that we have no knowledge of the *esse* at all; rather we ascribe it to someone as the assumption of the permanent state of the subject of willing.

3 Towards a Present-Day Interpretation

Many problems and inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's theory of character result from the use of Kantian terminology on the one side and some kind of naturalistic tendency on the other side. Regarding the terminology, we have already pointed to the problematic use of the term "intelligible character" that Schopenhauer himself admits, saying that it should be better called unintelligible. Another example that has significance for our subject is the talk of will as "thing-in-itself." In his later writings, Schopenhauer reflects upon the fact that his use of the term deviates from Kant, clarifying that will is the thing-in-itself only "relatively," namely, "in its relation to the appearance" (GB, 291).²³ Expressions like "thing-in-itself" or "intelligible character" suggest a reading in terms of traditional metaphysics, as if there were a nonempirical entity, an individually determined character existing before and independent of its appearance. The complaint about the terminology is widespread in the literature. Atwell rightly calls it "one of Schopenhauer's greatest weaknesses" that he "persisted in formulating his conception of the world in terminology, namely, Kant's, that often distorts that very conception."²⁴

By naturalistic tendency I mean the fact that Schopenhauer often explains psychological processes by physical models, like in the case of the burning of a body we referred to in section 2. We noted that this type of explanation contradicts the "revolutionary principle" according to which one should understand the action of a cause from the action of a motive. The reason for this apparent inconsistency may be that in the course of the development of the metaphysics of will, Schopenhauer intends to reduce

²³ Cf. WWR 2, 209, where Schopenhauer raises the question of what the will-in-itself is "quite apart from the fact that it presents itself, or in general appears, which is to say is cognized, as will? – This question is never to be answered because, as we already mentioned, being-cognized inherently contradicts being-in-itself and everything we cognize is as such mere appearance."

²⁴ Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World*, 183.

the difference between motivation and causality. In the dissertation he had settled the difference by claiming a special form of the principle of reason for acting. With the analogy between the act of one's own body and natural processes, motivation becomes "causality seen from within" (FR, 137) and a special law of motivation becomes superfluous. Motivation then is grouped under the principle of sufficient reason of becoming.²⁵ Thus, when comparing motivation with natural causality, Schopenhauer often disregards that in the act of grouping motivation under the law of causality, the latter is also thought of in analogy to motivation.²⁶

This tendency is even greater in the prize essays, where Schopenhauer, as he writes in the Preface, is forced to argue "analytically and *a posteriori*," (FW, 5) in order to remain incognito as a participant in the competition. Instead of "analytically and *a posteriori*" one can also say "empirically": It means to start "from facts either of outer experience or of consciousness" (OBM, 117). This is why, in the essay on freedom of will, character is introduced as a "force" like "other natural forces" (FW, 68). It is, like compassion in the second essay, taken as "the grounding fact . . . without itself being traced back to anything at all" (OBM, 117). Once presupposed as a force "of a certain constitution" (FW, 68), human character is endowed with properties: It is individual, empirical, constant and innate. And even moral qualities such as compassion and malice, which are a matter of cognition in the main work, are in the essays properties of character. In a strict sense none of this is empirically demonstrable but consists of assertions. We have seen in the previous section how cautiously Schopenhauer deals with the reach of empirical cognition. The naturalistic tendency becomes apparent as well in wordings like the well-known quote: "It is definitely neither metaphor nor hyperbole, but a quite dry and literal truth, that just as a ball cannot start into motion on a billiard table until it receives an impact, no more can a human being stand up from his chair until a motive draws or drives him away" (FW, 65). Compared with our exposition of Schopenhauer's theory of character in the dissertation and in the main work, this is a rather simplified version. Notwithstanding, or better, precisely because it is so, the remarks on character in the prize essays are the most popular ones, and the critical reception refers primarily to them. And this is the way Schopenhauer influenced the "characterologies" mentioned at the beginning of our essay.

²⁵ For a more detailed explanation of this process in the development of Schopenhauer's philosophy see Koßler, "Life Is but a Mirror," 233–35.

²⁶ With regard to the example of a burning body, this means that we can compare it with human action only if we understand the inner ability of the body in analogy to human will.

We want to show that by avoiding the consequences of the above-mentioned terminological and methodical problems, inconsistencies in Schopenhauer's theory of character can be eliminated, and – along the way – one can discover several logical relations between acting and the constitution of a subject which are interesting in regard to the “practice turn”²⁷ in the social sciences and humanities at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In order to avoid the difficulty that stems from the use of Kantian terminology, we first suggest replacing the expression “intelligible character” with “personhood.”²⁸ To contemporary ears, personhood better fits the original definition of intelligible character in the dissertation as the assumption of a unity of acts of willing that has the capability to have a character. On the one hand, the expression “person” abstracts from any particularity (which makes it suitable for juristic use); on the other hand, it includes individuality, which is not possible without particular qualities. Both aspects are combined in the necessary ability of a person to be a concrete individual, which can be called personhood. When we attribute personhood to someone, we assume that he or she is an individual with properties which set him or her apart from others, while we do not yet know any of these properties in the present case. We learn them by experience and in that way the abstract personhood becomes a concrete, individual character. In Schopenhauer's terminology, the ability to be an individual character was connected with the “character of the human species.” So, we can also eliminate this misleading expression, and in the following just say “character” when we mean individual character.

When we say that a person becomes a character, the new terminology makes it obvious that there is no presupposition of a person's individual properties in the sense that they belong a priori to the “essence” of a human being. As a realization of personhood, character does not come to exist prior to acting, whereby a certain individual behavior distances itself from other possibilities. It is a bit like playing a part in the theatre: There we have the position in the drama, for example of King Lear, and his character that only exists in the performance by an actor. However, the metaphor does not work sufficiently well, since in real life there is no “divine writer” who defines the position and basic requirements of the figure. We are, as it were,

²⁷ Cf. T. W. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina and E. von Savigny, eds. *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁸ I prefer “personhood” rather than “personality,” because the latter has become a substitute for character as mentioned at the beginning of the essay. In German “*Persönlichkeit*” is still different to “*Charakter*” which is important in what follows.

ourselves writing the story of our life that reveals our character in every action. At first sight, it looks as if this interpretation would exclude the possibility of a constant character, and as though character changes with every action. But this is not a necessary result. In acting we do not merely express our character but also come to know it, come to know what we are, not only just at the moment, but, since character is unchangeable, what we have always been in the past and will be in the future as well. In experiencing character, the character is that which is experiencing and, at the same time, it is what is experienced. The story of our life is not less unalterable when we learn it anew all the time. The strict concurrence of both is the basis of Schopenhauer's claim that "*in what we do, we come to know what we are.*" Putting this in terms of an image, one can compare character with a pathway and each action with a signpost: If we do not know the pathway from a map or from prior experience, any signpost may seem to show a new direction. Nevertheless, the pathway is always the same and cannot change. Only if we knew the pathway in advance could we say that it changes its direction at the signpost.

We called personhood the *necessary* ability to be an individual character. We cannot conceive a person without individuality showing itself in those actions through which a character defines itself against other possible individuals. Conversely, action is necessarily a realization of personhood since only by assuming a unity of a person can we ascribe a deed to it as a sign of character. This is the difference between event and action (or deed): The latter is always related to a person. And it also marks the limit of empirical observation: We can perceive only events, not actions, since actions require the nonempirical assumption of personhood. As necessary ability, personhood includes the possibility of any character – what Schopenhauer calls "what a human being in general would be able to do." And as a necessary realization of personhood, character is always related to those abilities of human beings, in general.

By virtue of thoughtfulness, any possible motive of a human being can, in principle, be present in the mind of someone as a wish until decision and deed show which of them is a sign of his character. With the action, an individual realization of mankind is chosen by separation from other possibilities. The more possible motives are present in the deliberation and the longer one reflects, the more precise is this separation, and therefore the more individual is the character. However, nobody can take everything in the world into consideration, and so nobody can be maximally individual, since it is always possible that their character would have acted differently on the basis of some motive that was not presented to it.

Strictly speaking, a character is always on the way to individuality but never attains it completely. This point is important for ethics since the individual is intrinsically connected with other human beings. Another point of ethical significance is the fact that thoughtfulness is the condition of any deed, not only those which follow deliberation. Every time we assign an action to a character, whether deliberate or affective, we assume that actions realizing humankind in a different way are at least possibly in the mind of the actor, even as unconscious wishes. When we feel responsible for an impulsive act, we are aware that another deed was possible. And since an individual realization of personhood is connected with the action, it is the same to say with Schopenhauer that the actor “had been another” (FW, 105). Schopenhauer is psychologically right in claiming that the blame applies to the actor and not the deed.

Of course, experiencing character is not, as Schopenhauer suggests, a process that proceeds exactly according to the empirical methods of science. We do not and cannot put ourselves or someone else in “completely identical circumstances” (FW, 70) in order to discover a constant behavior in the way we discover natural laws by experiments. It is rather like in the quote from the *Parerga* at the end of section 2, that we “construe” a character from one or several characteristic deeds. For a better understanding of this kind of construction it may be helpful to think briefly about a meaning of character that does not occur explicitly in Schopenhauer’s theory, namely, character as a sign. This meaning of character is famous through the “*characteristica universalis*” in Leibniz. According to Leibniz, characters signify objects expressing “the forms or formulas of things at all, i.e. their quality in general or the relation between the similar and dissimilar”²⁹ by showing their “mode of production.”³⁰ For instance, an ellipse characterizes the orbit of a planet not by reproducing the different states of it but by making visible the principle of movement that unites them. This unity would not be perceptible without drawing the line. In a similar way, when we think an action is characteristic of someone, we put it into the unity of his character which is created in the moment we

²⁹ G. W. Leibniz, “De Synthesi et Analysisi universali seu Arte inveniendi et judicandi,” in C. I. Gerhardt, ed., *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Vol. VII (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 292–98, 297ff.: “*In qua tractatur de rerum formis sive formulis in universum, hoc est, de qualitate in genere sive de simili et dissimili, prout alia atque aliae formulae ex ipsis . . . oriuntur*” (my translation).

³⁰ Ibid., 294: “*constitutionem, hoc est modum quo vel productibilem vel saltem possibilem esse apparet.*” With regard to Schopenhauer’s attempt at an immanent metaphysics, it is interesting that Leibniz applies characterization to the method of deciphering, “*in arte deciphratoria*” (ibid., 298), which is exactly the term Schopenhauer uses for his method in WWR 2, 192ff.

recognize it as a characteristic trait of the person. The deed expresses the character in the sense that it strikes someone as marked by it.³¹

There is much more to say about the possible application of Schopenhauer's theory of character to current debates, not only in regard to ethical issues such as responsibility or, as touched on above, of praxis theory,³² but also regarding the question of present-day metaphysics, which Schopenhauer intended to resolve with his "revolutionary principle."

³¹ Character stems from the Greek "*charassein*," which means to scratch or to mark.

³² For more on this point, see my essay, Koßler, "Charakter als praxistheoretischer Begriff," in T. Alkemeyer et al. eds., *Praxis denken. Konzepte und Kritik* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 151–68.

Schopenhauer in Dialogue with Fichte and Schelling: Schopenhauer's Critique of Moral Fatalism and His Turn to Freedom from Willing

Manja Kisner

I Introduction

Schopenhauer developed his system, which he presented in greatest detail in his major work *The World as Will and Representation* (WWR), first in dialogue with Kant, as he happily admitted, but also in dialogue with Fichte and Schelling, which he was reluctant to disclose openly.¹ Therefore, we can only fully comprehend the formation of Schopenhauer's philosophical system when we are acquainted with this historical background, particularly the influence of German idealism.² In the literature the influence of Kant on Schopenhauer is mostly acknowledged,³ but there is much less discussion about the influence of Fichte and Schelling on Schopenhauer's WWR.⁴ This chapter aims to fill this gap and to focus

¹ Schopenhauer's formative phase, which led to the publication of the first volume of the WWR in 1818–19, started in 1809 at the University of Göttingen, where he first studied medicine, but shortly after switched to philosophy. In the period 1809 to 1818, Schopenhauer intensively studied Fichte's and Schelling's works and attended Fichte's lectures in Berlin. Most of Schopenhauer's commentaries and critical notes on Fichte and Schelling stem from this period. See HN 2, HN 5.

² Hegel, however, is in this aspect less relevant, because there is no evidence that Schopenhauer really studied his works carefully. Also, in his early handwritten manuscripts, we find no commentaries or side notes on Hegel's works.

³ See, for instance, classical interpretations such as: Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987); Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴ Except for a few papers in English, most of the literature on Schopenhauer's relation with Fichte and Schelling is in German. My monograph offers a comprehensive overview of the influence that Kant, Fichte and Schelling had on the development of Schopenhauer's philosophy. See Manja Kisner, *Der Wille und das Ding an sich: Schopenhauers Willensmetaphysik in ihrem Bezug zu Kants kritischer Philosophie und dem nachkantischen Idealismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2016). Moreover, there are two monographs that discuss either Fichte or Schelling in relation to Schopenhauer, and an edited volume dedicated to the influence of classical German philosophy on

exclusively on Schopenhauer's reception of Fichte's and Schelling's philosophies.

There is one topic that is of particular importance for tracing the influence of German idealists on the development of the WWR that also indicates the novelty of Schopenhauer's approach, and that is his critique of moral fatalism. This critique offers us crucial insights into Schopenhauer's system because it addresses the essential point of his disagreement with Fichte and Schelling. As I will show, Schopenhauer adapts and appropriates crucial terminology in his WWR that we find also in Fichte and Schelling. Therefore, the broad framework of Schopenhauer's system appears, upon careful reading, very close to his predecessors. Yet, there is one crucial aspect that Schopenhauer decisively rejects from previous systems, turning them upside down.

This point of disagreement concerns Schopenhauer's stance on ethics. Fichte and Schelling try to treat ethics, to a greater or lesser extent, as a part of their systems and to describe ethical behavior in terms of ethical tendencies and strivings – for example, by speaking about ethical drives or striving for the light. Schopenhauer, by contrast, chooses the opposite path. For him, the real foundation of ethics cannot be appropriately described by using the same terms employed for characterizing the material world. The real reason why Schopenhauer still believes in the possibility of genuine ethical behavior lies in the possibility of negating one's inner driving force – that is, to negate the will. It is this negation of the will and his turn to freedom from willing that Schopenhauer offers as an alternative approach.

I will discuss the influences of Fichte and Schelling on Schopenhauer's WWR in three steps. My focus will be on the first volume of the WWR because it is this volume that emerged in direct confrontation with its predecessors. First, I will introduce Schopenhauer's critique of moral fatalism by focusing on Schopenhauer's early phase of producing the WWR, documented in his handwritten manuscripts (section 2). Second, I will turn to Fichte's arguments against fatalism and look at the impact they had on Schopenhauer's WWR (sections 3 and 4). Third, I will analyze Schelling's arguments against fatalism and discuss the WWR in this light (sections 5 and 6).

Schopenhauer. See Harald Schöndorf, *Der Leib im Denken Schopenhauers und Fichtes* (Munich: Johannes Berchmans Verlag, 1982); Robert Jan Berg, *Objektiver Idealismus und Voluntarismus in der Metaphysik Schellings und Schopenhauers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2003); Lore Hühn, ed., *Die Ethik Arthur Schopenhauers im Ausgang vom Deutschen Idealismus* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006).

2 Schopenhauer's Critique of Moral Fatalism

One of the main reasons why Schopenhauer rejects Fichte's and Schelling's idealistic systems lies in their different approaches to ethics. His critique, most explicitly evident in his handwritten manuscripts, is directed against Fichte's (HN 2, 340–360; HN 5, 45–58) and Schelling's (HN 2, 304–340; HN 5, 143–149) portrayal of the world in ethical terms. In the handwritten side notes to his copy of Fichte's *System of Ethics*, Schopenhauer coins the term “moral fatalism” to describe the problematic outcomes of Fichte's ethics. But even though Schopenhauer explicitly rejects moral fatalism only in his handwritten commentaries on Fichte, the same critique is implicitly present throughout his *oeuvre* and concerns not only Fichte's but also Schelling's approach.

What does Schopenhauer mean by the term “moral fatalism”? He uses this term as a clear delineation of his disagreement with Fichte. He describes Fichte's *System of Ethics* as a system of moral fatalism and, in a later note, points out that Fichte's entire philosophy must be deemed moral fatalism (HN 5, 53, 57).⁵ By describing Fichte's mistakes in his treatment of ethics, Schopenhauer employs an ironic and illustrative approach: he calls Fichte's system “a moral world-comedy [*moralische Weltkomödie*]” (HN 5, 56) and uses analogies with the animal kingdom to illuminate his position.⁶ According to Schopenhauer, Fichte describes human behavior in a way similar to how we describe the behavior of bees or beavers. Bees are driven to collectively build cells and a hive, beavers are driven to build dams together, and we humans, in an analogical way, possess ethical drives that guide our behavior and compel us to cooperate in societies. Schopenhauer strongly objects to Fichte's notion of ethical drives and ridicules his outcome. There are, I argue, two key negative consequences of Fichte's approach that Schopenhauer seeks to indicate through his critique of moral fatalism.

First, Schopenhauer's critique opposes Fichte's apparent naturalization of ethics. Relying on ethical drives when describing human behavior makes our actions a result of inner driving forces: drives necessitate our actions.

⁵ Schopenhauer also uses this characterization of Fichte's system in his much later book, *On the Basis of Morality* (1840). There, he interprets “the absolute ought [*das absolute Soll*]” as a “moral fate [*das moralische Fatum*]” and again uses the term “moral world-comedy” to describe Fichte's system (OBM, 177f.). The key to understanding Schopenhauer's critique of Fichte is that here he describes Fichte's ethics explicitly as despotic and hence immoral.

⁶ In another note, probably referring to Fichte's late *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schopenhauer designates Fichte's system as a fairy tale (HN 2, 341f.). For a detailed interpretation of Schopenhauer's reception of Fichte's late philosophy and of his fairy tale, see Kisner, *Der Wille und das Ding an sich*, 282–286.

What Schopenhauer criticizes here is not the reference to drives in general, but the interpretation of ethics in these terms – he rejects describing morality with naturalistic terminology. Fichte's ethics is a worldly ethics, Schopenhauer claims: "This ethics [Fichte's] has its purpose in the world, and points to the world" (HN 5, 56).⁷ Turning against Fichte, he sides with the ethics of Hindus, Plato, and Christianity because they do not try to find the purpose of ethics in the empirical world: "The ethics of the Hindu, Plato's, the Christian and mine, point away from the world and elsewhere" (HN 5, 56). As I will address later, this difference between Fichte and Schopenhauer is crucial for the development of Schopenhauer's doctrine of the negation of the will.

Second, Schopenhauer points to the teleological character of Fichte's ethics, which ultimately leads to the idea of god as an explanatory ground of ethical drives. Also in this context, Schopenhauer uses animal metaphors for an ironic look at Fichte's account: "He imagines the world as a beehive, us as the bees, and the dear God silently as the father of the bees, who just wants honey and wax" (HN 5, 55). As is evident in this quote, Schopenhauer's claim is not that Fichte openly refers to god in order to ground his system of ethics, but that Fichte's system silently presupposes problematic teleological and theological aspects.⁸

Schopenhauer does not offer a clear-cut definition of the term "moral fatalism," but based on the aforementioned problematic consequences of Fichte's ethics, we can already speculate what Schopenhauer understands as moral fatalism. With this term he labels a view that takes our ethical behavior as a necessary consequence of ethical drives. As a result, we are not free in what we do, but are only puppets in this moral world-comedy. This view leads – intentionally or not – to the idea of god guiding the world and giving it a moral meaning. In using this term he therefore wants to characterize a worldview that combines teleological presuppositions with naturalistic terminology. A crucial feature of this approach is that it ascribes specific, that is ethical, purposes to the empirical world. Hence, the appearing world is a necessary manifestation of ethical drives; these drives lead to a special kind of ethical necessitation that gives the empirical world an ethically teleological outlook. Schopenhauer does not reject empirical determinism or naturalism; it is rather the connection between the underlying ethical necessitation and its manifestation in the empirical

⁷ All translations from Schopenhauer's HN are mine.

⁸ In his essay *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer describes not only Fichte's but also Kant's moral philosophy as being implicitly theological.

world that he claims to find and discard in Fichte. As a result, there is an important difference between empirical determinism, which Schopenhauer himself will later approve of, and moral fatalism, which he criticizes. What Schopenhauer rejects here is not determinism in a broad sense, but fatalism in a specifically moral sense.⁹

Schopenhauer also raises very similar objections against Schelling as those against Fichte in his handwritten notes. Here, I will describe just one commentary referring to Schelling's *Philosophie und Religion* (1804). Schopenhauer does not use the term "moral fatalism" when speaking about Schelling, but he criticizes Schelling for conceiving of the world as an expression of god's will. Schopenhauer claims that Schelling "presents to us in one word the whole world as an occurrence [*Begebenheit*] according to finite laws, which flows from an act of God and has a final purpose [*Endabsicht*]" (HN 2, 329).

In this commentary, Schopenhauer objects to Schelling's teleological interpretation of the world and emphasizes that the categories of understanding as well as the laws of pure sensibility do not have transcendent use and therefore cannot be applied to objects outside of the empirical realm. At the same time, he also expresses an alternative view that is quite similar to what he says about ethics in his marginal notes on Fichte. Schopenhauer here celebrates a special kind of knowledge, called a better cognition (*bessres Erkennen*) (HN 2, 329), which he separates from empirical knowledge. Through this concept of better knowledge, he argues for a sharp split between the empirical and another, transcendent, realm. It is this division between the two realms that enables Schopenhauer to argue against moral fatalism. When the realm of morality and the realm of the empirical are not interdependent, there is no justification for explaining the empirical world in moral terms. On the contrary, the place for ethics has to be found elsewhere. In his early phase before the publication of the WWR,

⁹ As a result, we have to distinguish between different meanings of the term "fatalism." First, we can speak about fatalism in a broad sense. Schopenhauer gives a definition of this broad conception in the second volume of the WWR: "Fatalism should be understood as that doctrine that refers the existence of the world, along with the critical condition of the human race within the world, back to some absolute necessity which, for that very reason, does not admit of further explanation" (WWR 2, 663). Fatalism in this broad sense can represent either a teleological or nonteleological worldview. In both cases, the future is already predetermined and fixed, but in the first case the predetermination has a teleological purpose, whereas in the second case the world develops upon blind necessity. Second, there is Schopenhauer's specific use of moral fatalism, which describes a form of teleological fatalism and at the same time focuses on the underlying ethical necessitation governing the empirical world. Fatalism in a broad sense does not have to view the world as ethically necessitated; we can also imagine a fate that does not coincide with our ethical goals. For Schopenhauer's conception of moral fatalism, by contrast, the underlying ethical necessitation is crucial.

Schopenhauer described this transcendent realm with the help of this notion of better knowledge, which, in his major work, he then transformed into his doctrine of the negation of the will.¹⁰

3 Fichte and the Problem of Intelligible Fatalism

From Schopenhauer's critiques of Fichte and Schelling, we might get the impression that Schopenhauer's philosophy does not owe anything to his idealistic predecessors. This conclusion, however, is mistaken. In the rest of this chapter, I will show how Schopenhauer's rejection of moral fatalism developed in close conversation with Fichte and Schelling and how his account in the WWR interacts with their basic presuppositions.

To begin, I will provide a brief summary of Fichte's stance on fatalism. In contrast to Schopenhauer's portrayal of Fichte's system as a system of moral fatalism, Fichte himself was actually a harsh critic of fatalism. The aim of his philosophy was to rescue freedom from determinism or fatalism. Fichte raises his objections against fatalism most explicitly in the *Creuzer Review* (1793),¹¹ where he argues against Carl Christian Erhard Schmid's intelligible fatalism. Moreover, his *System of Ethics* (1798)¹² can be understood as implicitly arguing against fatalistic accounts. Fichte's rejection of Schmid's intelligible fatalism is of special importance for understanding the historical background in which Schopenhauer established his system.

Schmid introduced intelligible fatalism in his book *Versuch einer Moralphilosophie* (1790), in which he discussed Kant's theory of

¹⁰ The possibility of – either partial or complete – negation of the will is not only crucial for understanding the phenomena of asceticism, but is also the basis for Schopenhauer's theory of compassion as well as for his aesthetic theory. In the last two cases, the focus is only on a partial negation of the will. In aesthetic cognition Schopenhauer speaks about “will-less subject of cognition” (WWR 1, 200) and in his theory of compassion the taming of our egoistic will is also crucial.

¹¹ J. G. Fichte, “Rezension: Skeptische Betrachtungen über die Freyheit des Willens von Leonhard Creuzer,” in J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacobs, Hans Gliwitzky, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzaboo, 1964–2012), Series 1, Vol. 2 (hereafter GA I/2). I use the pagination of the German edition, but English translations are taken from J. G. Fichte, “Review of Leonhard Creuzer,” trans. Daniel Breazeale, *The Philosophical Forum* 32 (2001): 289–296. For the discussion on Fichte's *Creuzer Review* and its relevance for the development of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* see Wayne Martin, “Fichte's Creuzer Review and the Transformation of the Free Will Problem,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 26 (2018): 717–729; Georg Wallwitz, “Fichte und das Problem des intelligiblen Fatalismus,” *Fichte-Studien* 15 (1999): 121–145.

¹² J. G. Fichte, “Das System der Sittenlehre,” in J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacobs, Hans Gliwitzky, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzaboo, 1964–2012), Series 1, Vol. 5 (hereafter GA I/5). English translations are taken from J. G. Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, trans. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2005).

freedom.¹³ Schmid's controversial claim is that Kant's theory of freedom leads, if consistent, to intelligible fatalism. He defines intelligible fatalism as a position which ascribes to human actions a corresponding necessary, intelligible ground; thus, at the noumenal level, everything is completely determined. Just as empirical determinism states that every effect must have a preceding cause, so intelligible fatalism says that every human action must have a preceding intelligible cause. Not only moral but also immoral actions must have an intelligible ground. Accordingly, Schmid's intelligible fatalism is based on a special sort of idea of intelligible causality, or, more precisely, two sorts of intelligible causality, separately for good and for evil actions. An important consequence of this account is, according to Schmid, that we as acting subjects are not actively engaged in deciding what to do. Instead, all our actions are a result of an underlying or overarching plan and are therefore intelligibly determined.¹⁴ Although Schmid does not completely exclude the notion of metaphysical freedom, he undoubtedly rejects human freedom of choice.¹⁵

However, this conception of intelligible causality is highly problematic. As I pointed out in section 2, Schopenhauer rejects using the category of causality beyond the empirical realm. His arguments against moral fatalism are applicable also to Schmid's intelligible fatalism. Yet Schopenhauer is not the only one who turns against this fatalistic interpretation of intelligible causality – Fichte discusses and rejects Schmid's notion of intelligible fatalism in his review of Leonhard Creuzer's book.¹⁶ Schmid wrote a preface to this book, so Fichte discusses Creuzer's (and Reinhold's) as well as Schmid's positions in this review and comes to similar conclusions as Schopenhauer: Fichte also rejects a causal connection between the intelligible and empirical realms. What, then, are the main tenets of Fichte's critique of intelligible fatalism?

In the *Creuzer Review*, Fichte proposes a noncausal relationship between the intelligible and empirical realms by emphasizing that we can describe the acting subject from these two perspectives. On the one hand, the "I" can be

¹³ On Schmid's intelligible fatalism, see Wallwitz, "Fichte und das Problem," 124–130; Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50; Angelica Nuzzo, "Metamorphosen der Freiheit in der Jenenser Kant-Rezeption (1785–1794)," in *Evolution des Geistes: Jena um 1800*, ed. Friedrich Strack (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 484–518.

¹⁴ Cf. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 51.

¹⁵ Angelica Nuzzo emphasizes this aspect of Schmid's intelligible fatalism by calling it a moral determinism. See Nuzzo, "Metamorphosen der Freiheit," 505.

¹⁶ Fichte also criticizes Schmid's philosophy in a separate essay "Vergleichung des vom Hr. Prof. Schmid aufgestellten Systems mit der Wissenschaftslehre" (1796).

conceived as an intelligible “I,” and, on the other hand, as an empirical manifestation of the intelligible “I”, the “I” appears as an empirical “I.” The relationship between these two perspectives is not that of causality.¹⁷ Accordingly, Fichte distinguishes between the act of determining (*dem Bestimmen*) and determinate being (*dem Bestimmtheit*) (GA I/2, 9), and, at the same time, identifies the two modes of the “I”: “In this case, the act of determining is itself, at the same time, the process of becoming determined, and the determining subject is what becomes determined” (GA I/2, 11).

The consequence of this twofold perspective is that the intelligible realm is not the cause of the empirical, as in Schmid’s intelligible fatalism, but rather that Fichte insists on harmony between freedom and nature (GA I/2, 11). According to this view, the empirical is not subordinated to the intelligible, or vice versa. But the problem that Fichte faces in the *Creuzer Review* is how to explain this harmony between freedom and nature. Fichte does this by referring to a higher law which unifies both:

However, insofar as the determinate being produced through the causality of nature is supposed to be in harmony with the act of free determination (a harmony that, for the sake of a moral world order, also must be assumed), then the ground of such harmony can be assumed to lie neither in nature, which exercises no causality over freedom, nor in freedom, which has no causality within nature, but only in a higher law, which subsumes and unifies both freedom and nature – in, as it were, a pre-determined harmony of determinations through freedom with determinations through the laws of nature. (GA I/2, 11)

As Fichte claims in this statement, the harmony can lie neither in nature nor in freedom, but only in a higher law that represents the unification of freedom and nature.¹⁸ Key to this discussion of moral fatalism is Fichte’s assertion that this harmony must be assumed for the sake of a moral world order. This means that although Fichte seeks to reject Schmid’s causal intelligible fatalism, he still presupposes a moral world order and for that he draws on the idea of harmony. This aspect is crucial for understanding the difference between Fichte and Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer would agree with Fichte’s arguments against Schmid’s intelligible fatalism, but would object to Fichte’s hypothesis about a moral world order – referred to ironically by Schopenhauer as a moral world-comedy.

¹⁷ Therefore, Fichte disagrees with Schmid about interpreting the intelligible ground in terms of causality, but at the same time he agrees with Schmid that our actions, moral as well as immoral, have an intelligible ground. Cf. Wallwitz, “Fichte und das Problem,” 131.

¹⁸ For the discussion on how to interpret this higher law see Martin, “Fichte’s *Creuzer Review*,” 724.

In the *System of Ethics*, Fichte then further refines his understanding of the relation between the empirical and intelligible “I.”¹⁹ Without recounting the details of this text, let’s see how the idea of original identity between intelligible and empirical, or between freedom and nature, takes center stage. Here, Fichte speaks about the “absolute identity of the subject and the object in the I” (GA I/5, 21). The “I” is the carrier of this identity and can be described either from a subjective or an objective perspective. In this context, Fichte avoids the problem of intelligible fatalism by positing the “I” as the common ground between intelligible and empirical perspectives and denying the causal relation between the two.

In contrast to Schopenhauer, however, Fichte defines the “I” as pure activity (*Tätigkeit*) and characterizes it as a “drive for freedom, simply for freedom’s sake” (GA I/5, 132). As such, the “I” can also be described in terms of ethical drives, having its final aim as the realization of freedom: “The ethical drive demands freedom – for the sake of freedom” (GA I/5, 143). Here, the teleological and ethical dimension of Fichte’s conception of the “I,” which Schopenhauer rejected in his critique, comes to expression. Fichte’s “I” is not only embedded in nature – as the objective side of the “I” – but it also possesses ethical drives that guarantee the moral world order, and that, if not already realized, at least represent the final purpose of the world.

By way of conclusion, we can contend that Fichte on the one hand rejects Schmid’s intelligible fatalism, but on the other describes the activity of the “I” in terms of drives and makes use of the conception, specifically, of ethical drives. As we will see in the next section, Schopenhauer agrees with Fichte’s critique of Schmid’s account, but at the same time he strongly disagrees with Fichte’s reference to ethical drives and claims that the terminology of drives is misplaced when we speak about morality. Schopenhauer’s observation that Fichte’s portrayal of the world relies on ethical features is, to an extent, correct, but it is highly questionable whether Fichte would indeed agree in calling his worldview moral fatalism.

4 Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* as a Reply to Fichte

Fichte’s philosophy decisively influenced the development of Schopenhauer’s WWR. As I will demonstrate, Schopenhauer’s confrontation with Fichte’s

¹⁹ This twofold perspective on the intelligible and empirical is essential for Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* in general. Here, I point to the *System of Ethics* only because Schopenhauer expressed his critique of moral fatalism on the example of this book. But, of course, other works of Fichte would serve as well.

alleged moral fatalism played a crucial role in this process. In this light, Schopenhauer's twofold system outlined in his major work can be understood as opposing moral fatalism and offering an alternative to it. However, this does not mean that Schopenhauer's system has nothing in common with Fichte's. On the contrary, their basic framework is very similar, and many of the key concepts of Fichte's philosophy reappear in Schopenhauer's work, even though they disagree in their final results.

The point of agreement between Fichte and Schopenhauer lies in describing the objects (or the world in general) from two possible angles or perspectives and at the same time insisting on the relationship of identity between them. Borrowing terminology from Kant scholarship, I will call this a two-aspect view.²⁰ Schopenhauer's description of the world as will as well as representation is based on such a two-aspect view. He first presents this approach in his example of the individual, who can be described as a will from one perspective and a representation from another.

Schopenhauer claims that as individuals we are in possession of a double cognition (*doppelte Erkenntnis*) (WWR I, 129), that is, we are immediately acquainted with our willing – for example, with the acts of our will – but at the same time we can also observe the movements of our body and intuit our body as an object, hence as a representation.²¹ However, it would be incorrect to describe these two perspectives in terms of causes and effects. The will is not a cause of the body or vice versa:

An act of the will and an act of the body are not two different states cognized objectively, linked together in a causal chain, they do not stand in a relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same thing, only given in two entirely different ways: in one case immediately and in the other case to the understanding in intuition. (WWR I, 124f.)

Moreover, Schopenhauer extends this two-aspect view beyond our own first-person experience to other objects with which we are not immediately acquainted. By extrapolation, which does not have the status of proof but is only conceived as a continued reflection (*fortgesetzte Reflexion*) (WWR I, 134), Schopenhauer claims that all other objects can be described from these two perspectives as well: The principle of the will describes the inner essence, or the inner driving force, of objects and, at the same time, these

²⁰ I argue at length for Schopenhauer's two-aspect-view in Kisner, *Der Wille und das Ding an sich*, 112–142.

²¹ See also Manja Kisner, "Fichte's Moral Psychology of Drives and Feelings and Its Influence on Schopenhauer's Metaphysics of the Will," *International Yearbook of German Idealism* 15 (2020): 110–113.

objects appear as representations. Hence, he conceives of these representations as the external, objective side of the will, as “the objecthood of the will [*Objektivität des Willens*]” (WWR 1, 135). The world as representation, therefore, is a result of the manifestation of the will. As a result, he uses the will not only to describe the inner essence of human beings, but also ascribes it to other parts of nature, both organic and inorganic: “The will is the innermost, the kernel of every individual thing and likewise of the whole: it appears in every blind operation of a force of nature: it also appears in deliberative human action; these differ from each other only in the grade of their appearing, not in the essence of what appears” (WWR 1, 135). My interpretation is that Schopenhauer’s twofold view is a result of the influence of Fichte’s philosophy. As we have already seen, Fichte rejected the causal connection between intelligible and empirical sides in order to escape the fallacy of Schmid’s intelligible fatalism, and Schopenhauer follows the same path as Fichte.²² Yet Fichte’s focus is on the “I,” which we can describe from either a subjective or an objective perspective.²³ Also Schopenhauer starts with the twofold view of ourselves, but then goes beyond Fichte and interprets the entire world in these terms. Despite these subtle differences, they both reject the causal, two-world view that leads to intelligible fatalism and rather focus on two different ways of describing the world.

But Schopenhauer did not, as we have seen, criticize Fichte as an intelligible fatalist, but as a moral fatalist. Regarding this ethical aspect, Schopenhauer’s system indeed differs crucially from Fichte’s approach. The distinction between them is expressed most clearly with regard to how they describe the inner, or subjective, side of representations. Schopenhauer describes the will as the inner essence of the world of representations, as groundless and free (WWR 1, 131, 163). At this level, it is impossible to speak about necessity and lawfulness. Therefore, Schopenhauer speaks about the blind striving of the will. Here he again uses the same terminology as Fichte,

²² In his usual manner, however, Schopenhauer does not openly admit the similarities between his and Fichte’s system; instead, he only emphasizes the relevance of Kant’s transcendental distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances, which he does not interpret in a causal way, for his major work (see WWR 1, 444–452).

²³ There is another terminological difference between Fichte and Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer the relation between subject and object is valid only in the realm of representations. As a result, Schopenhauer makes use of two different relations: The subject–object relation is relevant for describing the world of representations, but it does not reveal anything about the inner essence of the representations. The relation between the world as a will and as representation is of another kind, describing the relation between the inner essence of the representations and their formal aspects. Fichte, by contrast, uses the subjective and objective relation to describe the relation between the intelligible and empirical realm.

namely, the terminology of strivings and drives, but he interprets them in a completely different way. While Fichte's striving represented the drive for freedom for freedom's sake, Schopenhauer's blind striving is free, but is also a groundless inner driving force of the world. As such, Schopenhauer's will does not have an ethical meaning, which is still present in Fichte.

Schopenhauer is quite fond of Fichte's terminology that emphasizes the dynamic inner driving force of the "I." This terminology of drives is important for Schopenhauer when describing nature in its constant transformations, so Schopenhauer takes up Fichtean terminology and adjusts it for his own purposes, operating with a similar framework as Fichte. Therefore, Schopenhauer does not reject the terminology of drives in general, but only Fichte's conception of ethical drives, since they are a part of Fichte's ethically teleological framework. Schopenhauer is skeptical about Fichte's use of ethical drives because they point to an underlying ethical necessitation of the world. As a result, he rejects Fichte's moral interpretation of the world. The world as a manifestation of the will is not a moral world order, but is first without any moral meaning. The empirical world is as a manifestation of the blind, nonmoral will.

The picture that Schopenhauer gives in the WWR certainly shares some common features with fatalistic worldviews because everything in nature appears, according to Schopenhauer, only as a manifestation of the blind striving of the will. But Schopenhauer's worldview is not based on moral fatalism, which is the crucial difference between his and Fichte's approach, as he observed in his handwritten notes and later confirmed in the WWR. It is not Fichte's methodology or terminology that Schopenhauer rejects, but it is Fichte's moral evaluation of these terms with which he disagrees.

5 Schelling on Fatalism and Freedom

To understand the historical background within which Schopenhauer developed the WWR, we must understand his reception of Schelling as well as Fichte. When he wrote the WWR, Schopenhauer was already very well acquainted with Schelling's philosophy, from his early essays to the *Freiheitsschrift* (1809).²⁴ Here, I will focus only on his later work because it

²⁴ F. W. J. Schelling, "Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände," in F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1856–1861), Series 1, Vol. 7 (hereafter SW I/7). English translations are taken from F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

represents the last phase of Schelling's philosophy that Schopenhauer knew, and because in this essay Schelling explicitly addresses the question of fatalism.

Schelling's freedom essay starts with a question about the compatibility between a philosophical system and freedom (SW I/7, 336). He notices that most of the previous philosophical accounts were not able to define freedom in a positive way and saw it as a part of the system. They either rejected freedom altogether or insisted on a negative and formal notion of freedom. The aim of Schelling's essay, in contrast, is to argue for a positive notion of freedom that is not incompatible with his systematic endeavors. For this purpose, Schelling must reject those accounts that he deems fatalistic, above all Spinoza's fatalistic system. As he explains, Spinoza's philosophy is not fatalistic because of its systematic framework, but because Spinoza treats everything in this system, including the will, as mere things (SW I/7, 349). This leads to a deterministic notion of a system, in which we can find no room for a positive notion of freedom.

To this fatalistic Spinozian account, Schelling juxtaposes his own alternative, which associates freedom and a system. This association can be further explained with the help of higher necessity (*höhere Notwendigkeit*), which Schelling defines as a necessity "which is equidistant from contingency and from compulsion or external determination," and which can be defined as "an inner necessity springing from the essence of the acting individual itself" (SW I/7, 383). Hence, higher necessity opposes empirical determinism as well as empirical indeterminism and points to a special sort of inner necessity for intelligible beings.²⁵ As such, this inner necessity represents the special act of self-determination, which is free and not subordinated to other causes, but nonetheless necessitates our actions, although not in a mechanistic way.

Therefore, it would be misleading to describe self-determination as an intelligible cause of appearances; it must instead be conceived as the inner essence of free beings, which illustrates how Schelling's position differs from Schmid's intelligible fatalism.²⁶ In this way, I posit that Schelling agrees with Fichte and Schopenhauer: Schelling perceives of the relationship between the intelligible and empirical realms in a noncausal way, where the intelligible is the essence of the empirical. But differently from Fichte and similarly to Schopenhauer, Schelling attributes the intelligible essence to all objects, hence also to nature, and not only to human

²⁵ Cf. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 93.

²⁶ Cf. Alistair Welchman, "Schelling's Moral Argument for a Metaphysics of Contingency," in *Nature and Realism in Schelling's Philosophy*, eds. Emilio Carlo Corriero and Andrea Dezi (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2013), 51f.

beings.²⁷ Moreover, Schelling's "metaphysics of contingency," which is based on this inner necessity, indicates a turn away from a conception of nature as rationally constituted toward Schelling's system, which is not completely determined, as Welchman correctly points out, but also leaves room for irrational moments.²⁸

A very important consequence of this account is that in his system Schelling not only emphasizes the striving to good, or to light (as the idea of existence tending toward light), but also allows for an opposing principle which he describes as the dark ground, or the ground tending to retreat into darkness. Accordingly, Schelling's system is based on two opposing principles, on an ideal and a real principle, where the first corresponds with the striving to light and the second corresponds to the irrational dimension within his system. The dark ground explains why the world for Schelling is not automatically a moral world order, but is a place in which evil is possible as well.

In Kosch's view, this twofold account based on the ideal and real principle is crucial for grasping the novelty of the freedom essay: The outcome of the struggle between the two principles is no longer conceived as being determined in advance.²⁹ There is a layer of indeterminacy in the world that speaks against the possibility of moral fatalism. We have seen that Fichte's system was not only constructed in opposition to Schmid's intelligible fatalism, but also relied on his conception of ethical striving, which Schopenhauer interpreted as moral fatalism. Schelling's approach in the freedom essay goes a step further by identifying not only striving to light, but also recognizing the inner, dark principle of the world. As a result, Schelling's system cannot be described as fatalism in a broad sense or as moral fatalism, because in his view contingency and indeterminacy are inherent to the world as such.

Accordingly, Schelling explicitly criticizes Fichte's system insofar as it assumes an ethical world order: "Thus Fichte's doctrine had to attest to its recognition of unity, if only in the paltry form of a moral ordering of the world, in which it nonetheless immediately fell into contradictions and unacceptable propositions" (SW I/7, 338). Schelling rejects the assumption that the world has a moral order and a rational constitution. This has key consequences for Schelling's views on ethics and human freedom, as his

²⁷ Cf. Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 94: "The nature of all being, not just human being, is determined conceptually rather than mechanistically, and this determination is in some sense a self-determination. . . . Everything is self-determining in accordance with its essence, and so human beings are as well."

²⁸ See Welchman, "Schelling's Moral Argument," 39. ²⁹ Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 99.

positive freedom is defined as a capacity for good and evil. This means that we humans are not only free when we act rationally and do what is good, but we are also free to do evil. Our being is not predetermined and even though we are not free at the empirical level, our essence is nonetheless free.³⁰

Without seeking here to settle all the issues that arise from this account, I would like to sum up two important consequences of Schelling's freedom essay. First, we have seen that Schelling's essay argues against intelligible as well as moral fatalism. Because he not only recognizes the ideal principle, but also the dark ground, his system retains a moment of contingency that opposes a clear rationalistic or moralistic worldview. Therefore, Schelling's account turns against moral fatalism. The world is not a manifestation of the moral world order, but contains the seed of evil along with the good. But, second, this dark ground nonetheless does not exclude the possibility of the good entirely. His system is also based on an idealistic principle, although not exclusively, and hence there is still striving to light and rationality included. What Schelling rejects is not the idea of ethical striving per se, but rather, a fatalistic interpretation of this striving.

6 Schopenhauer and the Freedom from Willing

Schelling's disassociation of freedom from morality offers a crucial influence in the development of Schopenhauer's WWR and decisively impacted Schopenhauer's turn to freedom from willing. The dominant trend of Schopenhauer's main work lies in moral disenchantment of the world, and, in that way, Schopenhauer's account can be understood as a continuation and radicalization of Schelling's freedom essay.³¹ Until now, my main focus has been on Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will and specifically his metaphysics of the affirmation of the will. However, the fundamental distinction between the German idealists and Schopenhauer lies in his metaphysics of the negation of the will.³² Schelling, of course, did not advertise the negation

³⁰ According to Kosch's interpretation, in the freedom essay Schelling is not able to offer a substantive normative ethics. Because of "the layer of indeterminacy" which his system emphasizes, Schelling cannot explain why we act as we act and he is not able to derive rational norms from his conception of positive freedom. See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, 101.

³¹ For further discussion about the similarities and differences between Schelling's freedom essay and Schopenhauer's philosophy see Kisner, *Der Wille und das Ding an sich*, 345–366.

³² Rudolf Malter divides Schopenhauer's system into these two parts – he distinguishes between the metaphysics of the affirmation of the will (*Metaphysik des sich bejahenden Willens*) found in the first and second books of WWR, and the metaphysics of the negation of the will (*Metaphysik des sich verneinenden Willens*) in the third and fourth books. See Rudolf Malter, *Arthur Schopenhauer. Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik des Willens* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991).

of the will in his system, but his approach nonetheless crucially influenced Schopenhauer's turn to freedom from willing.³³

We can observe an important line of development from Fichte's conception of ethical striving through Schelling's twofold account of striving to Schopenhauer's affirmation and negation of the will. In section 4, I discussed the relevance of Fichte's conception of striving for Schopenhauer, concluding that Schopenhauer agrees with Fichte about describing the will in dynamic terms and conceiving of it as a driving force, but disagrees with Fichte's teleological account of ethical drives. Schopenhauer's conception of the blind striving of the will is much closer to Schelling's account, which also includes a "dark ground" as an irrational moment in his system. But while Schelling's system is based on the mutual interplay of these two opposing principles, the dark ground evolves into the leading principle of Schopenhauer's WWR.

By calling the will "the will to life" (WWR 1, 301), Schopenhauer emphasizes that the leading principle of life lies in this dark, irrational principle. In Schopenhauer's account, the appearing world does not have any final purpose and is not teleologically oriented: "In fact the absence of all goals, of all boundaries, belongs to the essence of the will in itself, which is an endless striving" (WWR 1, 188). The same also holds for all living beings, who also do not have a final goal, but are only an expression of the blind will to life. The will, Schopenhauer writes, "forgoes entirely any final goal or purpose. It is always striving, because striving is its only essence, and is not brought to an end by reaching any goal; it is therefore not capable of any ultimate satisfaction; obstacles can only detain it, while in itself it goes on to infinity" (WWR 1, 335).

There is no room for a more positive conception of striving in Schopenhauer's system because of the monolithic status of his concept of the will. The will is the ground of everything, and, as such, it does not allow for any additional opposing principle. The appearing world is only a mirror of this purposeless will to life. Here, we see the crucial difference

³³ We also find important signs of Schelling's influence on Schopenhauer in other topics that appear in Schelling's freedom essay as well as in Schopenhauer's WWR; one such topic concerns the reappropriation of Kant's intelligible and empirical character. See, for instance, Matthias Kößler, "Empirischer und intelligibler Charakter: von Kant über Fries und Schelling zu Schopenhauer," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 76 (1995): 195–201; Lore Hühn, "Die intelligible Tat. Zu einer Gemeinsamkeit Schellings und Schopenhauers," in Christian Iber and Romano Pocaí, eds., *Selbstbesinnung der philosophischen Moderne: Beiträge zur kritischen Hermeneutik ihrer Grundbegriffe*, (Cuxhaven, Germany and Dartford, UK: Junghans, 1998), 55–94; Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, "Schopenhauer's Understanding of Schelling," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert Wicks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 49–66.

between Schelling and Schopenhauer. As I indicated previously, Schelling does not claim that the moral world order is guaranteed, but he also does not exclude this possibility altogether. Because of the contingency on which his system is based, the realization of morality is not predetermined, but it is also not discounted categorically.

Schopenhauer, by contrast, rejects the possibility of the moral world order completely – the appearing world will never turn into a moral world.³⁴ This means that even if Schelling cannot be described as a moral fatalist, he is nonetheless not denying the actuality of ethical striving. In this respect, Schelling's and Schopenhauer's positions fall apart. Schopenhauer rejects moral fatalism, because he does not think that the world has a moral order; on the contrary, according to his view our world is highly immoral and cannot be understood as a manifestation of some kind of inner ethical necessitation. Moreover, he categorically rejects the possibility of the moralization of the appearing world. As a result, the element of contingency, which is so important for Schelling, is lost in Schopenhauer's overwhelmingly pessimistic account of the will to life.

The appearing world as an expression of the will lacks moral motivations for Schopenhauer. This does not mean, however, that Schopenhauer discards the possibility of ethics altogether – by no means. But the crucial difference between the German idealists and Schopenhauer is that he does not find the foundation of ethics in the striving of the will but instead in the negation of the will. Schelling's solution for escaping moral fatalism – namely, by proposing two opposing principles – is not good enough for Schopenhauer. He chooses a more radical way and argues for the possibility of ending or impeding the striving of the will. I claim that Schopenhauer developed his doctrine of the negation of the will in the WWR on the basis of the preceding debates on fatalism that we find in Fichte and Schelling.

Explaining Schopenhauer's doctrine of the negation of the will remains philosophically problematic, and Schopenhauer admits this himself. I will not discuss Schopenhauer's doctrine at length here, but I will emphasize one aspect that is relevant for this comparison between Schelling and Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer claims that it is through reflection that the will can turn away from its blind striving and the reason why this is possible lies in our ability to negate the will. At the same time, he recognizes

³⁴ Cf. Alistair Welchman, "Evil in Schelling and Schopenhauer," in *The History of Evil in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Vol. IV, eds. Douglas Hedley, Chad Meister and Charles Taliaferro (London: Routledge, 2018), 159.

different degrees of the negation of the will.³⁵ First, the negation of the will as the opposite of the blind striving of the will, is the basis of ethics.³⁶ Here only a partial negation of the will, namely, as a limitation of our own will for the sake of another's will, is required. But, furthermore, Schopenhauer discusses also a complete negation, as an ultimate denial of the will to life: "I will now show how from the same source that gives rise to all goodness, love, virtue and nobility there ultimately emerges also what I call the negation of the will to life" (WWR 1, 405).

This complete negation of the will to life Schopenhauer finds in ascetism. He confirms the possibility of ascetism with the help of examples, which serve as proof that such a radical reversal of the will is possible, if not forever, then at least partially and for a limited time: "His will reverses course, and no longer affirms his own being, mirrored in appearance, but negates it instead. The phenomenon in which this is revealed is the transition from virtue to asceticism" (WWR 1, 406). When we act virtuously, we restrict and hence partially negate our own will in favor of others. In ascetism, however, we want to deny our will altogether; in this case he speaks about the negation of the will to life as such. This state of ultimate negation Schopenhauer describes as one of "voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete will-lessness" (WWR 1, 406). We are free only insofar as we can escape from the grip of the blind striving of the will. To do that, we must have the possibility of freeing ourselves from willing, and it is this process of achieving will-lessness that Schopenhauer describes as the negation of the will to life. This is a state of indifference toward the appearing world, in which we stop willing anything.

As long as we are only a product of the blind striving of the will, we are not free – here we are only a part of Schopenhauer's fatalistic worldview. But through reflection and cognition, we have the possibility to step outside of this process, at least for some moments. Thus, the possibility of freedom from willing is only given to humans. In this state, we become aware of the meaninglessness of the world, its never-ending suffering, and the lack of a final goal of our striving. According to Schopenhauer, it is here that we are free: "This negation is the only act of the freedom of the will that emerges into appearance" (WWR 1, 422). Schopenhauer's hope, then, does not lie in

³⁵ Schopenhauer claims that a "voluntary self-abolition of the will to life," which we observe in different forms, for instance in a voluntary renunciation of the sex drive, already represents "a degree of the negation of the will to life" (WWR 1, 360). Moreover, Schopenhauer's distinction between "right" and "wrong," which is crucial not only for his ethical but also his political theory, is also based on his account of the negation of the will.

³⁶ Here, his theory of compassion plays a central role. See especially WWR 1, 394–404; OBM, 196–235.

assuming a moral world order, as Fichte did, nor in hoping that the principle of light will defeat the dark ground, as Schelling did, but in the hope of holding up the purposelessness of blind striving and turning the will into the freedom from willing.

7 Conclusion

We are now able to recognize the historical background within which Schopenhauer's system developed. His confrontation with Fichte's and Schelling's philosophies played a crucial role in the formation of the WWR, and Schopenhauer's critique of moral fatalism is a result of this encounter. Most importantly, Schopenhauer rejects the idea of a moral world order and argues for a completely different approach to ethics based on the negation of the will. What is crucial for Schopenhauer's position is not a rejection of empirical determinism or fatalism in general, but instead a rejection of moral fatalism specifically. When it comes to Schopenhauer's assessment of the appearing world, he is not far from a deterministic worldview himself, as expressed in this ironic homage to fatalism:

Viewed overall and in a general manner, and extracting only the most significant features, the life of every individual is in fact always a tragedy; but worked through in detail, it has the character of a comedy. . . . So as if fate wanted to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our lives have to contain all the grief of a tragedy, but we cannot even assert our dignity as tragic players; instead, in the expanse of life's details we cannot escape the roles of foolish, comic characters. (WWR I, 348)

Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: (Hopeless) Romanticism?

Dennis Vanden Auweele

The purpose of this contribution is to discuss Schopenhauer's philosophical views of religion – or what would now be called a philosophy of religion, although Schopenhauer abhorred the term (see WWR 2, 185) – in light of more general discussions on the topic of religion around the time he wrote the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (hereafter WWR 1).¹ Schopenhauer is not often read as providing a philosophy of religion of the magnitude of his (near) contemporaries Kant, Hegel, Schelling or Schleiermacher. This contribution will contextualize Schopenhauer's views of religion in the early nineteenth century and will show that he was not only very generally aware of the discussions in the philosophy of religion of Romanticism, but that his own views navigate the concerns of the day in a fairly complex fashion.

Schopenhauer's first contributions to philosophy came in the heyday of discussions surrounding Kant's transcendental idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) and the later phase of the pantheism controversy (Jacobi, Fichte, Schelling). This is early nineteenth-century German philosophy. I mention this because this context has traditionally been overlooked as a defining feature of Schopenhauer's thought.² The reason for this is that Schopenhauer's primary impact upon philosophy plays out mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century.³ Louis Dupré is one

¹ I would like to thank Jonathan Head and William Desmond for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. I would also like to thank the organizers and participants of the 2019 gathering of the Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft in Frankfurt am Main for their thoughts on this work. In particular, I want to thank Sandra Shapshay, Marco Segala and Matthias Kößler for their extensive engagement with my work.

² For discussion of this dearth, see especially: Lore Hühn, "Die Wiederkkehr des Verdrängten. Überlegungen zur Rolle des Anfangs bei Schelling und Schopenhauer," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 86 (2005): 55–69; Marcello Ruta, *Schopenhauer et Schelling, philosophes du temps et de l'éternité. La deuxième voie du post-kantisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014); Dennis Vanden Auweele, *The Kantian Foundation of Schopenhauer's Pessimism* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

³ See the work of Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

example of a larger tendency to think that “Schopenhauer’s moral theory may owe more to Plato, the *Upanishads*, or Buddhism than to German Idealism.”⁴ When it comes to the main philosophical discussions of the day, such as the possibility of relating freedom to system (Fichte, Hegel, Schelling), Schopenhauer is seldom recognized as a valuable interlocutor.⁵

Some changes are being made to this state of affairs. Scholars are recognizing that Schopenhauer was well-versed in Fichte’s and Schelling’s philosophy, and some commentators have done important work in showing the impact of their thought on Schopenhauer.⁶ However, there is another important context of thought in which Schopenhauer’s philosophy emerged that is left almost entirely unexplored. I am referring particularly to a discussion inspired by Romanticism, specifically in philosophy, theology and philology, on the very nature of (revealed and mythological) religion. I will outline this highly contentious field in section 1 of this contribution. This discussion was on the relationship between world mythologies and the connection a mythology has to a particular people (*Volk*). An attempt was made to show how all mythologies had a common ground, but also that there were nevertheless fundamental differences between mythologies. While Schopenhauer’s philosophy of religion seems at first sight unconnected to these discussions, I want to show that already in 1818/19 Schopenhauer offers an answer to these fundamental questions by way of his general definition of intuitive insight and error.

1 Mythology, the East and the Creuzer Debate

Schopenhauer is a well-known enthusiast for south Asia, most notably the Indian *Upanishads*. This was not at all untimely. There was an explosion of

⁴ Louis Dupré, *The Quest of the Absolute* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 199.

⁵ One example is Paul Franks’ excellent discussion of post-Kantian discussions in transcendental philosophy, which does not mention Schopenhauer even once: Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁶ Schopenhauer had moved to Berlin in order to study under Fichte and Schleiermacher – but he quickly became dissatisfied with their work and lecturing. See Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 120–146; David Cartwright, *Schopenhauer. A Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 336–402. For an extensive survey of how Schopenhauer emerged within this context, see: Vanden Auweele, *Kantian Foundation*; also, Manja Kisner, *Der Wille und das Ding an sich: Schopenhauers Willensmetaphysik in ihrem Bezug zu Kants kritischer Philosophie und dem nachkantischen Idealismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann Verlag, 2016).

information about south Asia pouring into nineteenth-century Europe.⁷ This coincided – and clashed – with the nationalist ambitions of the day, which hoped to cultivate a sense of unique national or cultural identity for the emerging German nation. This arose in opposition to the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment: The Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sought to explore the hallmark features of a people (*Volk*), often in terms of language, mythology, ethics and religion. This explains the general interest in folklore and myth taken by the Romantics (e.g. Grimm, Herder, Schelling, Schlegel), but it also led to a quest to define the characteristics of the German people.

This interest in national and cultural identity was inspired by two historical factors. First, the Enlightenment had generally preached a universalism which left Europeans bereft of a more particular identity, a horizon of thought from which it could flourish. Reflecting back on this about a century later, Nietzsche would write that “a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centred to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end.”⁸ This lack of identity caused a veritable explosion of historical and sociological research into the distinguishing features of a people (which inspired the nationalism that played a major role in German unification). Second, since the late eighteenth century, there had been a significant surge in philological, anthropological and sociological data on Asian culture and religion. Romanticism was generally fascinated with Asia. For Schopenhauer, the major factor here was the 1801–2 translation into Latin by the French Indologist Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) of what he transcribed as the *Oupnek'hat*. Other translations and studies of Asian culture came before and many were to follow.

These two factors caused something of a split in reflections on religion. On the one hand, German philosophers were generally concerned with finding the distinguishing features of the German people. This was often conceived of in terms of the German language and mythology, which they traced back to Greek culture. On the other hand, the surge in information

⁷ For an overview of these sources on the Far East see Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2010), 23–28.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 63. For more on this, see the work of George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany. Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

on Asian religion and mythology (Hinduism, Brahmanism, Buddhism) made it remarkably difficult for German authors to uphold obstinately the uniqueness of German mythology and culture. There were simply too many similarities not only between the different European mythologies, but also between the European mythologies and Egyptian/Judaic mythology, and, what is more, between the European mythologies and Asian mythologies.⁹ Exposure to Asian cultures made most scholars of the early nineteenth century, including Schopenhauer, realize that Asian mythology might have been the original and most ancient expression of religion.

The sources of mythology found in India and Persia predated any record of Judaism, or Greek or even Egyptian mythology. This changed what had been a general policy of derision or mistrust of Asia into fascination, and it called for delving into this most original source of all mythology.¹⁰ Among philologists (but casting significant influence upon theologians and philosophers as well), it was the noted work of the Marburg philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858) that caused a major stir in intellectual circles. Between 1810 and 1812 Creuzer published a monumental series of books entitled *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, followed by second editions between 1819 and 1821, which featured two extra volumes by Creuzer's student, Franz Joseph Mone.¹¹ Creuzer had an impressive impact on his philosophical contemporaries, most notably Friedrich Schlegel, F. W. J. Schelling and G. W. F. Hegel,¹² but, among

⁹ Despite his enthusiasm for Asian religion, Schopenhauer is often read somewhat nonchalantly as an atheist. For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's atheism was more reflex than argument: "The ungodliness of existence counted for him as something given, palpable, indisputable." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 219 (aphorism #357). There are ways in which Schopenhauer certainly does count as an atheist, but there are also respects in which he is incredibly charitable to and appreciative of religion. For a critical assessment of Schopenhauer's engagement with Indian thought, see: Johann Gesterling, "Schopenhauer und Indien," in *Ethik und Vernunft. Schopenhauer in unserer Zeit*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1995), 53–60; Raj Singh, *Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

¹⁰ There is a long history of distrust of Asia in Western culture, the best example being the continued threat of Muslim invasion. This began to change in the nineteenth century with a slow recognition that there might be some profound wisdom in Asia that could help reorient Western culture. Schopenhauer is one example of this, especially in the way he elevated Buddhism and Hinduism over Christianity and Judaism. Another example is Nietzsche, whose philosophical advocate was the Persian prophet Zoroaster and whose favored deity was Dionysus, who also hailed from Asia (also to be found in Greek mythology). Hegel's treatment of Asia, and especially Chinese religion, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1820s) is an exception to this tendency.

¹¹ G. F. Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*. 6 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

¹² For a discussion of Creuzer's influence on Hegel see: Jon Stewart, "Hegel, Creuzer, and the Rise of Orientalism," *The Owl of Minerva* 45 no. 4 (2013): 13–34. Schelling engages thoroughly with Creuzer in his Berlin lectures on Mythology and Revelation. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical*

philologists, Creuzer was attacked relentlessly, especially by Johann Heinrich Voss.

Creuzer's argument is long and intricate, but it can be summarized as follows. Through a philological study of different world mythologies, he became convinced that mythology emerged for the first time in India when the Brahman priests had a sort of primal revelation (*Uroffenbarung*). These priests decided to communicate this revelation to other, nonmystic individuals in mythological stories. According to Creuzer, the main topic of these stories concerned the unity of opposites, which meant the sublation of differences between the higher and the lower (what he called "the symbol"). These stories travelled to the Middle East (giving rise to Judaism), then to Egypt (giving rise to Egyptian mythology), and finally crossed the Mediterranean (engendering Pelasgian mythology and all subsequent European mythologies). Creuzer's fundamental point, then, is that all mythology has the same fundamental message, but this message goes through a process of alienation the more it is distanced from its origins. The truest expression of mythology, and so the foundational moment of human culture, was in India.¹³

Much could be said about how Creuzer's argument was received, but I will focus on how the above point impacted Schopenhauer's philosophy.¹⁴ There are only a few references to Creuzer in Schopenhauer's work and most of these were put into print after Creuzer's fame had already waned. All of these are disparaging. The timing of these comments, and their negative nature, makes one suspect that something of a more personal nature was involved. Schopenhauer had briefly met Creuzer in 1819 in Heidelberg and, nine years later, following the advice of his longtime friend Ernst Anton Lewald, Schopenhauer wrote one single letter to Creuzer. The letter concerned Schopenhauer's proclaimed love for Heidelberg, the south-German climate and his financial independence. He told Creuzer of his desire to relocate to Heidelberg and that, in order to take part in civil society, he wanted to acquire *jus legendi* (the right to vote). The easiest way to do so seems to have been to have some sort of (small) appointment at the University of Heidelberg. Given that Schopenhauer was at that time still

Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 64–67.

¹³ This point was not unique to Creuzer. He was, however, the most eloquent and sustained defender of this thesis. Other defenders were Heinrich Julius Klaproth, Friedrich Majer and, importantly, Friedrich von Schlegel in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808). Schopenhauer would only mention Schlegel late in his publications, and he would attack him often for his obscurantism (WWR 2, 601–602).

¹⁴ For an extensive overview of the argument and reception of Creuzer's work, see Williamson, *Longing for Myth in Germany*, 121–150.

looking for a university to habilitate, his real motivator was probably the university position, rather than the right to vote or the southern climate. After almost two months, Creuzer answered Schopenhauer's letter politely, but briefly. He said that interest in philosophy in southern Germany was terribly low and that the chances of Schopenhauer acquiring any sort of position were slim. Creuzer added that even Hegel had to leave south Germany. He made a thinly veiled insult that the great Hegel (who befriended Creuzer) could not keep a position – so what chances did Schopenhauer have? Being dismissed in such a way might have rubbed the irritable Schopenhauer up the wrong way.¹⁵

These personal misgivings should not distract from the fact that Schopenhauer did agree with Creuzer on a number of fundamental points. The most important of these is that both hold the view that religion is most authentically found in Ancient India and that all other religions and mythologies are derived from that religion. Some of Schopenhauer's declarations on the subject could very well have been written by Creuzer. For instance, when Schopenhauer discusses the powers of intuition of the Brahman forefathers:

Those who were significantly closer to the origin of the human race and the well-springs of organic nature than we are at present also had both greater energy in their powers of intuitive cognition and also a more accurate cast of mind, which made them capable of a purer, more immediate grasp of the essence of nature and thus able to satisfy the metaphysical need in a worthier fashion: thus arose among the Brahman forefathers, the Rishis, the almost superhuman conceptions that were later recorded in the Upanishads of the *Vedas*. (WWR 2, 178)

A further example is when Schopenhauer discusses the lack of a theory of immortality in Judaism, from which he infers that “the Christianity of the New Testament has such a doctrine because it is Indian in spirit and therefore, more than likely, Indian in origin too, even if only via Egypt” (WWR 2, 558). Yet another example is when Schopenhauer makes the sweeping claim that the few good parts of Judaism have an Indian origin: “The myth of original sin (although probably, like the whole of Judaism, borrowed from the Zend Avesta: *Bundahishn*, 15) is the only thing in the Old Testament to which I can assign a metaphysical truth, if only an allegorical one” (WWR 2, 666). Finally, Schopenhauer argues that a similar mythology is derived from a similar root language: “Could it not be that just as the roots of the Gothic and the Greek languages lie in

¹⁵ Their correspondence can be consulted in Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch 48 (1967), 183–184. I want to thank Matthias Kößler and Marco Segala for pointing out this letter to me.

Sanskrit, there is an older mythology from which the Greek and the Jewish mythologies have arisen?" (PP 2, 439–440).

These fundamental points are innovations of Creuzer that Schopenhauer does not really acknowledge as such. He seems to pass them off as if they were his own. There were, however, some philosophical points of contention between Schopenhauer and Creuzer. The most important of these is that Creuzer was mainly a conceptualist and Schopenhauer a nonconceptualist when it came to the truth of mythology. This meant that Creuzer believed that mythology ultimately expresses a truth that is based on and can be phrased according to conceptual knowing, albeit one that is difficult to grasp. For Schopenhauer, however, mythology is the "expression of truths that are merely intuited rather than thought out" (PP 2, 435). He means that no clearly thought-out conceptual truth precedes the formation of mythology. The truth of mythology is felt immediately.

This was likely the most controversial point of Creuzer's analysis of the genesis of mythology: A certain truth was revealed, at a certain time, to a certain people, whose cognitive import transcended that time and those people. The Indian Brahmins were philosophical knowers well before the existence of philosophy, and even before mythology. Historically, this point seems incredible as it would put some sort of philosophy prior to mythology. To sustain such a view, Schopenhauer continued, would require too much cognitive imposition upon mythology: "Creuzer's grim and over-meticulous interpretation of mythology," Schopenhauer argues, "conducted with endless diffuseness and tormenting long-windedness, as the depository of physical and metaphysical truths deliberately set forth in them, I must dispatch using Aristotle's refutation: 'As concerns mythical drivel, it is not worthwhile to consider it seriously' " (PP 2, 435).

There is another point of contention between Schopenhauer and Creuzer. Schopenhauer felt that Creuzer tended to diminish the importance of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedas* in favor of Brahmanist mythology. This led to a sort of univocalizing of the philosophy and mythology and the religion of India. "That the European scholars (for instance Creuzer and many others)," Schopenhauer writes, "are very much and extensively concerned with the silly fairy tales of the *Indian Purana folk religion* or mythology and neglect the wisdom of the *Veda's* (the *Upanishads* are almost never mentioned) is typical."¹⁶ For Schopenhauer, there is a distinction between the *Upanishads*,

¹⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Cogitata. Philosophische Notizen aus dem Nachlass*, eds. Ernst Ziegler, Anke Brumloop, Clemens Müller and Manfred Wagner (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), 183 [211,2] (my translation).

which are more philosophical in nature, and folk religion, which is more religious. Many of Schopenhauer's philological contemporaries collapsed the difference between these two, in the same way that many of his philosophical contemporaries collapsed the difference between philosophy and (Christian) religion. For Schopenhauer, not all Asian culture is myth and religion. This makes Asian thought not merely an object of investigation for European scholars, but puts it on a par with European thought.¹⁷

Two responses to Creuzer's argument, each at an opposite extreme, are possible here. On the one hand, one could overemphasize the uniqueness of one's own mythology and exalt it over all connections with other mythologies (this was often done to the benefit of Christianity). Thus, one attempts to minimize or disregard entirely the similarities between mythologies. On the other hand, one could accept that all mythologies share some similar ground or origin, and thereby entertain a rationalist (Hegel) or mystical (Schleiermacher) view of mythology. Here, one attempts to minimize or disregard the distinctions between mythologies. The more nuanced treatments of this subject have tried to mediate between both extremes, accepting that the different world mythologies cannot be thought of as simply distinct, but must have some sort of shared origin.

For Creuzer, this origin lies in a primal revelation. F. W. J. Schelling, who would engage with Creuzer extensively in his Berlin Lectures (1841 onward), did not find this view persuasive. Instead, he argued that the "consanguinity" of mythology resulted from the fact that all mythology flows from humanity's latent memory of its connection to divinity. Schelling argued that the similarities between different mythologies derive not from a primal, propositional revelation, but from an intimate, inward connection that all human beings have to the absolute. The differences between different mythologies are accounted for by the use of different languages that, following their own linguistic logic, constitute a world of gods (polytheism).¹⁸

At a time when nationalist interest aimed to exalt German and Greek cultures (which were thought of as related), Creuzer suggested that Greek mythology had its roots outside of Europe: We ought not to "cut off the roots of Greek myths that continue into different countries."¹⁹ This point was not readily received because of these nationalist concerns which aimed

¹⁷ I want to thank Alistair Welchman for pointing this out to me.

¹⁸ For further discussion of Schelling's and Schopenhauer's theory of mythology see Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Schopenhauer and the Later Schelling in Dialogue on Mythology," *The Journal of Religion* 97 no. 4 (2017): 451–474.

¹⁹ Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie*, Vol. 12, xviii.

to show that, as well as similarities, there are also important differences between religions and mythologies. Philosophers not only sought to account for these differences, but were also looking for criteria by which certain mythologies and religions could be raised above others.²⁰ This often happened to benefit their own mythology. On this point, then, Schopenhauer was closer to Creuzer than most of his Romantic contemporaries (such as Schelling) who privileged Christianity. Schopenhauer was not particularly concerned with elevating German or Christian culture, but he was nonetheless committed to showing that there are some distinguishing features between different mythologies. He categorically argued that there are both truthful (and so pessimistic) mythologies, and deceitful (and so optimistic) mythologies. To do so, he had, at the same time, to argue that all mythologies have a common ground, but that these can relate in different (better and worse) ways to this common ground.

2 Common Ground

In the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (first edition 1844, revised in 1859, hereafter WW2), Schopenhauer articulates his famous and influential theory of humanity's metaphysical need. Human beings tend to wonder about their existence, a wonder inspired by the confrontation with suffering and death. Uncertainty about the meaning of suffering can frustrate a human being to such an extent, Schopenhauer believes, that nothing is more fortuitous than that a "beam of light should fall on the obscurity of our being and offer us some sort of key to this perplexing existence in which nothing is clear except its misery and its nothingness" (WW2 2, 180). Out of this urgent need, human beings conjure up two forms of metaphysics, namely, religion and philosophy, which provide an answer to the riddle of existence. The difference between these two is that philosophy is based on argumentation and is true in a strict sense while religion is based on faith and is true in an allegorical sense.

Schopenhauer's theory of the emergence of religion and mythology in 1844 appears, then, fairly straightforward. He seems to hold the position that at some point certain human beings devised stories that explain our purpose in the world. These stories are supposed to quench their and others' need for a metaphysics that gives meaning to suffering. However,

²⁰ On this latter point, see especially Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F.C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

such a relatively simple theory seems to be no match for the multifaceted theories on the emergence of religion in Schopenhauer's contemporaries, Schelling and Hegel. For Hegel, religion arises as a manifestation of spirit, where spirit is being symbolically represented and gradually comes to self-consciousness through a historical process. For Schelling, religion arises initially as an instinctive–unconscious symbolical representation of our latent memory of a connection to divinity in mythology, which is superseded by the true revelation of God through Christ to which we willfully adjust our understanding in a philosophical religion. What is more, Schopenhauer's theory seems to be hopelessly at a loss to account for how all world mythologies seem to share in a spirit of consanguinity in making religion and mythology a highly individual invention aroused by a typically human need.

Luckily, Schopenhauer's theory is more complex and has to be discussed in its organic connection to his epistemology and aesthetics. Schopenhauer connects his discussion of humanity's metaphysical need to §15 of WWR 1. The connection between these paragraphs is not obvious: most of §15 of WWR 1 is a protracted discussion of logical, scientific and mathematical proof. Over halfway through the paragraph (WWR 1, 94–99), Schopenhauer starts to consider things that are more relevant to our present discussion, such as “the origin and possibility of *error*” (WWR 1, 94) – to which we will return in the next section as it helps to explain how religions and mythologies differ. Toward the end of the paragraph, Schopenhauer's discussion shifts to even more general concerns, namely, what it means to explain something. In science, mathematics and logic, an explanation very generally means “to show that the relation between two representations is that of the particular form of the principle of sufficient reason governing the class to which the representations belong” (WWR 1, 96). After such an explanation is given, science, mathematics or logic can query no more. For instance, when we know that two plus two equals four, we cannot query (within mathematics) as to why this is the case.

This means that logic, science and mathematics must leave more ultimate questions untouched as their very structure does not allow them to move beyond the different roots of the principle of sufficient reason – an argument repeated in §17 of WWR 1. In §15, Schopenhauer therefore claims that two topics are beyond the capacity of any logical, mathematical or scientific proof: “First, the principle of sufficient reason itself in all four of its forms, which cannot be explained because it is the principle of all explanation . . . ; and second that which the principle of sufficient reason

does not reach, although what is original in all appearances stems from it: the thing in itself" (WWR 1, 96). Neither science, mathematics nor logic can address these subjects appropriately because they operate in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason. The only viable candidate for questioning the original ground of things (and the legitimacy of the principle of sufficient reason) is, then, philosophy. The reason for this is that "philosophy is also the most universal kind of knowledge and its fundamental principles cannot therefore be the consequences of some other kind of yet more universal knowledge" (WWR 1, 98). Philosophy cannot derive from some more ultimate sense of knowing. The ultimate source of philosophy, as a statement on the what-ness of being, must lie in something unconnected to conceptual knowing.

Philosophy must therefore start from something more concrete than conceptual knowing. If philosophy is going to explain anything about the ultimate ground of the world, its "cognition is intuitive, concrete cognition" (WWR 1, 98) and the philosophical or metaphysical explanation of this intuitive cognition is to "reproduce this in the abstract" (WWR 1, 98). It falls, then, to philosophy to provide a statement on the world in itself: "Philosophy must be an abstract statement of the essence of the entire world, of the whole as well of all its parts" (WWR 1, 98). For Schopenhauer, the starting point of philosophy, immediate and concrete intuition, is outside of conceptual reason.

This argument anticipates the famous claim at the start of book two of WWR 1 that through knowledge of ourselves as will via our connection to our body, we can infer the inner essence of reality as will. This knowledge or awareness of ourselves is, then, intuitive and concrete rather than conceptual and abstract. It is the task of metaphysics to put intuitive knowledge into abstract terms. This way of thinking about philosophy as having its intuition beyond the principle of sufficient reason provides a first clue to better understanding Schopenhauer's point about humanity's metaphysical need. From his hasty definition of metaphysics in WWR 2 – and perhaps due to his often-repeated aversion to repeating himself – one could easily assume that religion emerges to give a conceptual and highly individual explanation of the why of the world. However, given his broad definition of philosophy in WWR 1, Schopenhauer suggests that all metaphysics (both philosophy and religion) arises so as to be an abstract statement of an intuitive and concrete cognition. The ultimate ground of religious stories is therefore not conceptual but intuitive. They are an expression, by use of parables, stories and symbols rather than arguments, of a truth intuitively felt by the originator of that mythology. That means

that it is neither whim nor rationalizing that moves the originator of myth to create stories that give meaning to life; mythology (for it to be true mythology) requires the originator of myth to be inspired by an intuitive vision of the singular essence of reality. This vision is not itself a conceptual truth (which is what Creuzer made it out to be), but must be a higher, perhaps mystical, intuition.

This is what Schopenhauer's epistemology teaches us about the emergence of religion and mythology: All metaphysics arises through an intuitive insight into the fundamental structure of reality. Schopenhauer privileges intuition to such extent that he is happy to almost dismiss the dogmas of religion entirely:

We see how irrelevant the dogmatic part of all religions is, and how it is like the morsels we throw to beasts of prey in order to hold them off from pursuing us, or like the golden apples of Atalanta; and we see how it must be directed according to the degree of each nation's mental training and therefore a new development of the times calls for a new religion. (MR I, 67)

Schopenhauer says that he subscribes to an allegorical theory of religion, but this can be confusing. An allegorical interpretation of religion seems to suggest that a philosophical truth is dressed up in symbols and parables so as to convey this to those "who cannot be obliged to think" (WWR 2, 184). Schelling gave some powerful arguments against an allegorical theory of mythology in his *Lectures on Mythology and Revelation* in Berlin (1840s).²¹ An allegorical interpretation seems to suggest that some (philosophical) truth necessarily precedes the religious expression of that truth (if allegory means truth wrapped up in stories). If one explains something with an allegory, one must grasp the abstract truth of that something before narrating it through allegory. What Schopenhauer means when he calls his theory of religion allegorical is that religion and mythology use such things as allegories, symbols and rituals to convey their intuitive message. Philosophy, however, uses argumentation to transmit its message. The intuitive message of religion and philosophy precedes its formulation in allegory or argument.

²¹ These arguments are as follows. First, the allegorical interpretation makes mythology nonreligious as it does not aim or purport to believe in supernatural entities. This is difficult to maintain as all mythology involves stories about supernatural entities of some sort. Second, the allegorical interpretation puts philosophy before mythology, as it states that mythology is philosophy in allegorical form. Historically, people were first engrossed in mythology before developing some form of philosophy. For a fuller discussion, see my "Schopenhauer and the Later Schelling In Dialogue," 461–464.

Schopenhauer's point can be clarified further by means of his aesthetics. It seems to be the case that those who are the originators of a religion are close to what Schopenhauer calls the genius-artist.²² The primary reason for this is that religions are founded on intuition rather than on conceptual knowing. The genius, in Schopenhauer's famous definition, has three characteristics in excess that set him or her apart from the bulk of humanity. First, they have an excess of rational intuition, which allows them to "stop considering the Where, When, Why and Wherefore of things but simply and exclusively consider the What [which is] a peaceful contemplation of the natural object that is directly present [and] we lose ourselves in the object completely" (WWR 1, 210). The 'what' here is not a conceptual truth, but something that is intuitive and concrete. For most human beings for most of the time, intuition is subservient to will and therefore only captures the 'what' as it relates to the individual being (or subjective, as a representation). In the genius, this capacity disconnects from the will and becomes a pure beholding. Second, the genius has an excess of creative imagination, which allows the genius-artist to echo this intuition in a more determinate form, namely, the artwork. Imagination allows the artist to "complete, arrange, depict, retain and reproduce all the meaningful images of life at will" (WWR 2, 433). Lastly, the genius-artist has an excess amount of perseverance, which allows them to maintain their state of rational intuition and creative imagination to a longer extent than most human beings.

Rather than giving a very private interpretation of the world, the artist channels a profound, intuitive insight that is common to all of humanity (a Platonic Idea) in a piece of art. It would make sense for the originator of religion and mythology to work in a similar way. Those human beings who have an excess of intuitive insight into the final ground of the world use their creative imagination to conjure up stories, parables and allegories to create a metaphysical system that communicates their intuitive insight. As such, art, philosophy and religion are ideally based in a shared fundamental intuition of the nature of the world. A major difference is that art is supposed to represent the timeless essence of the Platonic Ideas, the eternal archetypes of things. Religion, however, is closer to philosophy and goes directly to the most fundamental truth of being, namely, the will as the in-itself. Although I am unsure if Schopenhauer would agree, it feels like the religion-founder

²² For a fuller discussion on how the classical counterpoints to an allegorical interpretation of religion do not apply to Schopenhauer, see my "Schopenhauer and the Later Schelling in Dialogue," 470–473.

might be more profound than the artist in Schopenhauer's philosophy since the religion-founder pierces into the very essence of reality. Most artists – excluding perhaps the musician – remain on the level of the Platonic Ideas.

That truth of being that is ideally channeled by philosophers, prophets and artists is eternally and universally the same, namely, that life is necessarily filled with suffering, that desire is the cause of suffering, that compassion is the true moral incentive, and that ascetic self-denial is the only way out of our miserable lot.²³ This universal insight is the same everywhere, and those who intuitively created and sculpted the world mythologies express this same fundamental truth in a way similar to how Schopenhauer narrated this truth philosophically. This argument therefore accounts for the commonality between different mythologies. While mythology is an invention, it is an invention inspired by a true vision of reality to which some individuals have access.

3 Opposing Views

Certain individuals have an intuitive grasp of the essence of reality. Among these, Schopenhauer would number philosophers, artists and religion-founders as those who have an excess of rational intuition compared to most people. Schopenhauer is also clear that there is bad philosophy, bad art and bad religion. Here, the (intuitive) insight has not sufficiently pierced into the fundamental truth of being and then is designed improperly, namely, as based either on the principle of sufficient reason or on life affirmation. To account for differences between various expressions of religion, we have to look first at Schopenhauer's theory of error and then investigate how error can manifest in varying proportions in different expressions of mythology and religion.

Schopenhauer's philosophy of error is in §15 of WWR 1, where he defines error as "*an inference from consequent to ground*" which he then

²³ In her recent work, Sandra Shapshay gives good reasons not to take Schopenhauer at his hyperbolic word on describing the individual's lot as necessarily miserable; *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics. Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). In her view, Schopenhauer was committed in WWR 1 to an essentialist theory of (human) nature because of the Platonic Ideas that explain individuation through species. As Schopenhauer dropped the metaphysical function of the Platonic Ideas in WWR 2 (but retained their aesthetical function), he would no longer be committed to a view that life is necessarily and essentially bad. In fact, there are signs that Schopenhauer allows for serious improvement through personal, cultural and societal progress. My own discussion here focusses on Schopenhauer's theory of religion in WWR 1, but it would be interesting to explore in what way this turnaround in Schopenhauer's view could affect his general theory of religion. That will have to be taken up elsewhere.

describes as “wholly analogous to illusion” (WWR I, 94). He calls an error in judgment “wholly analogous” to an error in perception. Error is a judgment, which made a faulty use of induction, deduction and/or abduction; illusion, to the contrary, is not a judgment but a mistaken perception, which involves a careless use of our faculties of perception. Schopenhauer calls our attention to a common factor shared by error and illusion, namely, that they involve “excessive haste or an inadequate awareness of what is possible” (WWR I, 94). In other words, it is possible to err because of a lack of endurance or imagination.

For our current purposes, it is most interesting to focus on illusion. Schopenhauer faults some of his contemporaries, especially Fichte, Jacobi and Schleiermacher, for putting excess confidence in a faculty of feeling. In his revised doctoral dissertation, he would berate these philosophers for calling their faculty of feeling a sense of reason:

the name of reason, however, was assigned to a completely imaginary, or in plain language, a made-up faculty, in which one had something like a little window that opened upon the superlunary, or indeed the supernatural world, a window through which could be received, fully finished and prepared, all the truths that old-fashioned, honest, reflective, and deliberative reason had previously troubled itself with and struggled over in vain for centuries. (SW I, 123)

Schopenhauer does not attack his contemporaries because they propose a feeling or intuitive insight so as to inquire into the ultimate foundation of reality. This is, indeed, the only avenue available after Schopenhauer swears his allegiance to Kantian transcendental idealism that bars propositional or conceptual knowledge of noumenal reality (except through practical reason, but Schopenhauer is quick to dismiss this). Instead, Schopenhauer criticizes his contemporaries because they have pierced insufficiently deeply into ultimate reality as they lacked the endurance to proceed all the way to the very foundation. He is generally more forgiving toward Schelling, who recognizes a sense of will at the bottom of reality in his *Freedom Essay* and realizes that propositional logic does not apply beyond representational reality.²⁴

²⁴ Schopenhauer studied Schelling's *Freedom Essay* diligently. In his doctoral dissertation, he even made several positive comments about Schelling's philosophy (these comments were taken out in later editions). For discussion of the resonances between Schelling and Schopenhauer, see Hühn, “Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten,” 55–69; Lore Hühn, “Der Wille, der Nichts Will: Zum Paradox negativer Freiheit bei Schelling und Schopenhauer,” in *Die Ethik Arthur Schopenhauers im Ausgang vom Deutschen Idealismus (Fichte/Schelling)*, ed. Lore Hühn (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006), 149–160.

In other words, Schopenhauer's contemporaries were subject to illusions of intuition and erred in their judgment because they lacked the endurance to pierce deeply into the abyss of reality. They generally stopped at one or another sense of foundational rationality (e.g. Fichte's absolute I, Hegel's absolute spirit) and did not recognize that rationality is itself an expression of the nonrational. So they have started their investigation of the world as already caught in the net of reason – as Schelling would say – but they failed to ask how it wound up there.²⁵ They have erred in their perception of the fundamentals about reality and have built their philosophical systems on a bad foundation. In his own view, Schopenhauer has managed to see most fundamentally into reality and has devised a philosophy constructed on the proper foundation.

Given the similarities we discussed in section 2 between philosophy and religion (both a species of metaphysics), the same type of illusion equally applies to religion and mythology. While the common ground of all religion is an intuitive and concrete feeling of the foundation of reality, some religion-founders have failed to delve deeply enough into the essence of reality and have built their religion on a problematic foundation. This is how Schopenhauer manages to make two distinctions with regard to religion. First, there is the distinction between a fundamentally good or bad religion. In WWR 2, this is put forward as whether these religions are “optimistic or pessimistic, i.e., whether they depict the existence of this world as self-justified, hence praise and laud it, or rather regard it as something that can only be conceived as the consequence of our guilt and thus really ought not to exist” (WWR 2, 187).

A second distinction is between a properly or improperly executed good religion. This means that a religion can have a proper foundation but its execution and development might have wavered from that fundamental message. This allows Schopenhauer not only to make the above-mentioned qualitative distinction between religions (optimistic/pessimistic), but also a quantitative distinction: the value of a religion depends upon “the greater or lesser truth content that [religion] carries under the veil of allegory, and then on the greater or less distinctness with which that content is visible through the veil, hence on the veil's transparency” (WWR 2, 186).

²⁵ See: F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147. For more on Schopenhauer's starting point outside of reason, see Sebastian Gardner, “Schopenhauer's Contraction of Reason: Clarifying Kant and Undoing German Idealism,” *The Kantian Review*, 17 (2012): 375–401.

I have argued elsewhere that Schopenhauer entertains five criteria for considering something a truthful mythology or religion.²⁶ The first two of these, which are qualitative rather than quantitative, are that existence is perceived as punishment and that nature is without redemptive potential. A religion that lacks one (Judaism/Islam) or both (paganism) of these criteria is an optimistic religion and therefore per definition untruthful. The last three criteria can exist on a quantitative spectrum: to preach compassion as leading to mysticism; to retain an aura of mystery around religious dogmas; and to recognize that the teaching of a religion is not literal, but allegorical. In Schopenhauer's view, Christianity is in doctrine a pessimistic religion, but contemporary forms of Christianity have strayed from the core of Christianity: "Catholicism seems to me to be a shamefully abused form of Christianity, but Protestantism a degenerate one" (WWR 2, 719). The reason for this is that Catholicism holds that some works (*labora*) are a means toward salvation and Protestantism dismisses either compassion or asceticism. Buddhism and Hinduism fare better on this score, but Buddhism ultimately is elevated by Schopenhauer because it retains more of an aura of mystery and is less prone to be taken literally (WWR 2, 186).

These criteria therefore show how religion and mythology can differ both fundamentally and quantitatively. While all metaphysics emerges through an intuitive insight, one can lack the stamina to delve sufficiently profoundly into the abyss of reality. This is how errors in intuition or illusions arise. With this, Schopenhauer has a fairly complex theory of the emergence of religion in WWR 1 which he, regrettably, never fully systematically unfolded. Instead, his attention was focused mostly on either warning about the dangers of religion or making use of truthful religions as a vehicle for philosophical truth.

4 Conclusion

Schopenhauer had an early appreciation for the salience of religion. In his short but memorable career as a university lecturer, he would in fact

²⁶ Some make the point that theism is the prime difficulty with religion for Schopenhauer – for example, Christopher Janaway, "Schopenhauer's Pessimism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 319–323. Others argue that the main problem with optimistic religions is that they seek salvation in this world – for example, Robert Wicks, "Arthur Schopenhauer," in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Graham Oppy and N. N. Trakakis (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2008), 82–91. I discuss the five criteria in more detail in Dennis Vanden Auweele, "Schopenhauer on Religious Pessimism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78 (2015): 53–71.

emphasize that Christian theology had caught on earlier to the tension between freedom and necessity and even expressed this tension more clearly than philosophy.²⁷ Theological discussion in the early nineteenth century attempted to grasp both the similarities between different religions and mythologies, but also to provide a means by which certain religions are seen as more potent or reliable expressions of a profound truth. Schopenhauer's view of religion is often simplified as an allegorical approach that cannot be on a par with the more complex philosophies of religion of Kant, Hegel and Schelling. According to Schopenhauer, religion is like philosophy since both are attempts to communicate an intuitive truth, although not by rational argument (philosophy) but through narratives and symbols. This truth is germane to the whole of humanity because all human beings are intrinsically connected as the manifestation of will. Some individuals more potently grasp that inner essence, and draw the proper conclusion, which makes their views more truthful.

²⁷ See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Vorlesung über die gesamte Philosophie. Viertes Teil: Metaphysik der Sitten*, eds. Daniel Schubbe, Judith Werntgen-Schmidt and Daniel Elon (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2017), 242 and 243.

Maja and Nieban in *The World as Will and Representation*

Stephan Atzert

Two ideas from Buddhism and Vedanta – *Nieban* (Nirvana/Nibbana) and *Maja* (Maya) – feature prominently in *The World as Will and Representation*. The false evaluation of the will in the individual's experience is the "veil of Maya," a concept derived from the *Upanishads*, whereas *Nieban* – according to Schopenhauer, similar to the completed denial of the will – is a term from the early discourses of the Buddha. Both carry high levels of significance for a number of world views; here, we attempt to shed light only on the way in which they became constitutive for *The World as Will and Representation*. For the concept of Maya, Schopenhauer's main source was the *Oupnek'hat*, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron's 1801 Latin translation of a Persian compendium of the *Upanishads*, the *Sirr-i-Akbar*. This work, published in 1656, had been commissioned and edited by the eldest son of Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal – crown prince Dara Shukoh, the ill-fated brother of Aurangzeb. The description of the *Nieban* was encountered by Schopenhauer in the *Asiatick Researches*, in a long report by Francis Buchanan from 1799, entitled "On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas."

Even though the use of *Maja* and *Nieban* (Schopenhauer's spellings) in *The World as Will and Representation* suggests them to be complementary – *Maja* as the cognitive delusion originating from the will, and *Nieban* as freedom from that delusion – they emerged from two very different trajectories in Indian thought. It is instructive to review some aspects of those terms, in order to appreciate Schopenhauer's originality in his selective appropriation and subsequent coupling of them. Maya was of central importance to the dogmatists of the Vedanta schools. From Shankara (eighth century) to Nimbarka (thirteenth century) and Chaitanya (sixteenth century), Maya is both the manifest form and the veil of the absolute. The Vedantic views hold that the world of appearances with its joys and sufferings is unreal, and only the all-encompassing God-consciousness (Brahman) is real. *Nieban*, by contrast, is a key concept in the teachings of the Buddha. According to those

teachings, the world with its gods and humans is real, there is no hidden essence. Ignorance and delusion lead to suffering, but this is not due to a lack of knowledge of the divine. Rather, suffering results from a sense of self that is impervious to the changing nature of all things and denies its lack of structural control over them. Freedom from suffering can be developed by understanding how one's sense of self depends on things outside its control, such as the senses, the body, the external world – and thus one is subject to feelings, moods, thoughts, to decay, disease and death, to name but a few. The state of freedom is always that of an individual – this freedom does not exist separately from those who have developed it – and it is marked by the lack of conceit¹ in the sense of self, which means the absence of greed, aversion and delusion.

By contrast, the teachers of Vedanta proposed a very different construct. They emphasized “being,” “consciousness” and “bliss” as characteristics of an unmoving eternal being, which rests unperturbed by the illusory changes of Maya. The Buddha very rarely, if at all, mentioned Maya,² and Vedanta does not deal with Nibbana – yet in *The World as Will and Representation* they become two halves of a whole, shaping distinctly Schopenhauer's philosophical system.

In the first German edition, Schopenhauer used the spellings *Maja* and *Nieban* (the latter based on Buchanan); in later editions they are referred to as *Maja* and *Nirwana*. Here I use the terms *Maja* and *Nieban*, to denote these concepts as they are shaped by Schopenhauer's reception of his sources. When I refer to these concepts in their own right – independent of Schopenhauer's reception of them, as part of Indian traditions – I use the spelling Maya and the original Pali term Nibbana (Nirvana, or *Nirwana* – in the German spelling – transliterates a later sanskritized form). Diacritics have been omitted.

1 *Maja*

“*Maja*” is invariably used as a synonym for the *principium individuationis*, Schopenhauer's term for the various forms and differentiations which comprise the world as representation. Maya in the *Upanishads* is “most often identified to be the magical power of God employed to create the world and

¹ In the sense of an overestimation of one's capacity to intervene in the world as will and representation.

² It is not mentioned in the early discourses, except as magical illusion (i.e. a trick conjured by a magician) in the *Phenapindupama Sutta* (*Samyutta Nikaya* 22.95). The term “Maya” occurs in later scriptures, such as *Milinda Panha* and the *Abhidhamma*. More prominent terms in the early discourses are “anatta” (a concept questioning a sense of self that overestimates its own importance) and “upadana” (assumptions about one's body and mind) to denote the erroneous appropriation of one's experience, and, of course, “samsara,” the endless suffering in the rounds of rebirth. While Schopenhauer mentions these terms in a couple of footnotes, they are not central to his work.

then to hide behind the matter out of which it was made.”³ Schopenhauer does not refer to the veil of God, he emphasizes the conjunction of representation and falsification, as in the “Critique of Kantian Philosophy,” where he writes about the *principium individuationis*:

The same truth, presented in yet another, completely different way, is also a principal doctrine of the *Vedas* and *Puranas*; this is the doctrine of *māyā*, which simply means what Kant called appearance in contrast to the thing in itself: because the work of *māyā* is declared to be precisely the visible world in which we exist, a magic trick, an insubstantial, intrinsically inessential semblance comparable to an optical illusion or a dream, a veil wrapped around human consciousness, something that can be said both to be and not to be with equal truth and equal falsity. (WWR I, 445–6; SW 2, 496)

A number of similar statements in both volumes of *The World as Will and Representation* link the specifically Indian idea of Maya to the *principium individuationis* as a veil over reality, as a dream-like illusion: “The closest comparison known to the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* for our whole knowledge of the actual world (which they call the web of *māyā*) is that of a dream – and this is the comparison they use most frequently” (WWR I, 38–9; SW 2, 20). But the *principium individuationis* functions not just like a magic trick; it is not only a cognitive distortion, but conjures a wrong evaluation of the world in the individual, because the individuation “keeps the will for life in error concerning its own nature: it is the *māyā* of Brahmanism” (WWR I, 617; SW 2, 691).

As we will see in the course of this chapter, Schopenhauer’s Maya is not quite that of Brahmanism. Rather, he embraces certain aspects which he had encountered in the *Oupnek’hat*, Anquetil-Duperron’s translation of a Persian compendium of the *Upanishads* called *Sirr-i-Akbar*. Upanishad is a generic term which refers to a set of instructions (one meaning of Upanishad is “sitting near the teacher”). It is used to denote otherwise diverse Sanskrit texts which unsystematically deliberate on epistemological, ontological and theological themes. We know that Schopenhauer borrowed the *Oupnek’hat* from the library in Weimar in 1814, and subsequently bought a copy, which he read repeatedly and annotated extensively until his death in 1860. The *Oupnek’hat* is the translation of the *Sirr-i-Akbar*, “The Great Secret,” itself a Persian translation from Sanskrit, was commissioned and overseen by the enlightened Sufi, Prince Dara Shukoh, in Northern India. It appears to have been Dara Shukoh’s mature work, in some ways an early example of inter-religious dialogue, in other ways a syncretistic espousal of universalism, in

³ Douglas Berger, *The Veil of Maya: Schopenhauer’s System and Early Indian Thought* (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publications, 2004), 62.

which Sufi influences are conjoined with Advaita Vedantic interpretations of the *Upanishads*.

Cross mentions B. J. Hasrat's 1982 study, which shows that redactors had inserted unmarked excerpts from commentaries by Shankara, the main proponent of Advaita Vedanta, into the *Sirr-i-Akbar*. Thus the ideas of a school of thought which claimed that the nondualistic union of individual soul and highest absolute is the gist of the *Upanishads* form the primary hermeneutical angle of the *Oupnek'hat*. Not only is this perspective filtered through later Sufi ideas, the meaning of Maya, as has been shown, had already altered by the time of Dara Shukoh.⁴ Maya as ignorance and delusion, the passive *Maya* of the *Upanishads*, had become *Mahamaya*, that is, *Shakti*, the dynamic life principle understood as a force within and without, which Dara Shukoh translated as *Isq*.⁵ *Isq* had a range of meanings similar to *Shakti*, which included vitality, zest, destruction, as well as illusion. Anquetil-Duperron translates *Isq* as *amor*. Consequently Maya in the *Oupnek'hat* has many aspects, one being the creative power and eternal love of God, another being desire and a third aspect being delusion.⁶ A very important feature of this third aspect is the discursive containment of the assertion of delusion in the need for emancipation from it. We can see how this conceptualization of a dynamic and variable force served as a pool of ideas, from which Schopenhauer selectively engages with the second and third aspect:

Because the inner essence of nature, the will to life, expresses itself most strongly in the sex drive, Hesiod and Parmenides, the ancient writers and philosophers, said very significantly that *Eros* was the first, the creator, the principle out of which all things emerged. . . . The *māyā* of the Indians too, whose work and web is the entire illusory world, is paraphrased by *amor*. (WWR 1, 356; SW 2, 389)

Thus, in the *Oupnek'hat*, the negation of *amor* means emancipation from Maya. This aspect is prominent in *The World as Will and Representation*, as the motto of the fourth book: "*Tempore quo cognitio simul advenit, amor e medio supersurrexit. Oupnek'hat*, studio Anquetil Duperron, vol. II, p. 216." This is translated as "When knowledge asserted itself, thence arose desire" (WWR 1, 297; SW 2, 318), but that translation could be misleading, for desire does not arise from knowledge. The meaning of the phrase ought to be rendered as

⁴ Mario Piantelli, "La 'Maya' nelle upanisad di Schopenhauer," *Annuario Filosofico* 2 (1986): 163–207.

⁵ Stephen Cross, *Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 177.

⁶ Martina Kurbel, *Jenseits des Satzes vom Grund: Schopenhauers Lehre von der Wesenserkenntnis im Kontext seiner Oupnek'hat-Rezeption* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2015), 129f.

“love took flight” in the sense of “when insight arrived, desire had left.”⁷ This figure of thought contributes to Schopenhauer’s seemingly paradoxical concept of freedom from willing as absence of that which is, while the world as will and representation remains standing as a hollow shell (i.e. “cognition” and “amor” are in the same arena, but maintain different relationships to the arena, the world). The deep sense of frustration with the will as delusion, which stands in the way of cognizing “the true being,” demanding the negation of the world, is also present in the *Oupnek’hat*.

Kurbel draws our attention to a passage which was marked with double lines in the margin by Schopenhauer:

Through maya the true appears as the false and the false as the true. Like the rope appears to be a snake, which is the false, the snake appears to be a rope, which is the true; and maya could be called the non-true and the non-false, for it shows that the world is without true existence, it does not show, that the entire existence is real, it shows that that endures which is not and that which exists does not endure; the true being, which reveals itself, it shows not, it shows the world, which in truth does not exist; this itself is maya.⁸

This poetic reflection on a dual perspective of the world also brings to the fore an ambiguity inherent in experience and transposes the confusing uncertainty of shifting epistemological grounds into a cosmological framework.

Schopenhauer adapts this reflection in two ways. First, he discards the division into real and unreal, instead separating the experience of the world into the real and the ideal, into will and representation. Delusion and confusion originate not from the relationship of Maya and the divine, but from the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. The discrepancy arises from unwillingness to comprehend the nature of desire in the broadest sense, as insatiable craving, blind willing, endless wanting, even though the real asserts itself in the death of the individual. Second, the delusion can come to an end, but not by, in, or through the (nominalized) “true being.” Instead, the end of Maya is brought about by denial of the will, and results in the quieting of the will, both of which ultimately rest on intuitively understanding the will rightly. Thus, Schopenhauer made his own choices in interpreting the *Oupnek’hat*,

⁷ Ibid., 129, quotes the German translation by Mischel, who translates the above Latin phrase as “when insight arrives, love ends”; Franz Mischel, *Das Oupnek’hat* (Dresden: C. Heinrich, 1882), 271. Paul Deussen (founder of the Schopenhauer Society and one of the editors of Schopenhauer’s works) notes that the passage is an interpolation by the redactors of the *Sirr-i Akbar* into the *Atma-Upanishad*, perhaps from Mundaka-Up. 2, 2, 8 or Çvetāçvatara-Up. I, 10; Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [1859], in Paul Deussen (ed.) *Schopenhauers Sämtliche Werke* (München: Piper Verlag, 1911–41), Vol. I, 317.

⁸ Mischel, *Das Oupnek’hat*, 271, quoted in Kurbel, *Jenseits des Satzes vom Grund*, 132. My literal English translation of Mischel’s German version of the *Oupnek’hat*.

choices marked by a psychologization of the idea of Maya, stripping it of its theological connotations. In order to appreciate these modifications, we note Schopenhauer's reluctance to superimpose a theological framework, and his decision to decipher the logic inherent in the object of his investigation.

From what has been presented so far, it comes as no surprise that all scholarly monographs agree that the formation of Schopenhauer's system was strongly influenced by his encounter with Maya in the *Oupnek'hat*, as stated by Berger:

Schopenhauer certainly does not adopt, nor does he pretend he is adopting, the entire "conceptual scheme" of *Maya* that we find in the *Upanishads* or the centuries of Vedantic commentary on them. . . . He thematizes it as the *principium individuationis*, the forms of sensibility of time and space whereby a homogeneous and unitary metaphysical will becomes manifest through the intellect as a world of heterogeneous individuals and things.⁹

In line with Berger, Cross holds that the concept of *Maya* in the *Oupnek'hat* determined Schopenhauer's understanding of the individual's perception as a conditioned phenomenon, but in relation to the will as such the *Oupnek'hat* merely confirmed his ideas. By contrast, App and Kurbel provide ample evidence that the *Oupnek'hat* was relevant not only in suggesting *Maya* as an exotic synonym for the will as *principium individuationis*, but in serving as a blueprint for the conceptualization of the will as such.¹⁰

From the few passages quoted above, it appears that Schopenhauer rejects the notion of *Maya* as an emanation of divine love and emphasizes its intertwined aspects of desire and delusion, as highlighted by Berger: "Schopenhauer develops an understanding of *Maya* over time which makes it at once an epistemological category of falsification and an existential fetter that causes human beings to comport themselves . . . in an ethically pernicious way."¹¹ Indeed, Schopenhauer's reception of *Maya* features will as suffering, as an existential problem to be solved, as a force – perhaps less malignant than doomed – which needs to be overcome by understanding it thoroughly from within.

⁹ Berger, "The Veil of Maya," 263.

¹⁰ Urs App, *Schopenhauers Kompass* (Rorschach/Kyoto: University Media, 2011), 149, 185f. App examines Schopenhauer's markings and marginal comments in the *Oupnek'hat* in Urs App, "Required Reading: Schopenhauer's Favourite Book," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 93 (2012): 65–85. Kurbel, *Jenseits des Satzes vom Grund*, develops a contextual reading of Schopenhauer's copy of the *Oupnek'hat* with recourse to the Latin and the German translation by Mischel. Both establish a clear case for Schopenhauer's reading of *Maya* as bringing forth a dual nature of desire and substanceless variety, that is, creation and illusion.

¹¹ Berger, "The Veil of Maya," 63.

In order to appreciate Schopenhauer's conceptualization of freedom from the existential fetter of Maya, Duperron's commentary *De Kantismo*, an appendix to the main work published in the second volume of the *Oupnek'hat*, deserves consideration.¹² Duperron had read Kant only cursorily, and *De Kantismo* is an admixture of ideas, many of which cannot be attributed to Kant. Yet two themes are relevant for Schopenhauer's conceptualization of freedom from Maya. Duperron presents a psychologization of the notion of Atman (the individual soul), which goes hand in hand with a preference for an intuitive sense of self over epistemological skepticism based on reason. For Duperron such a sense of self constitutes the way out of the clutches of Maya; it allows immediate insight, for in it the human is subject and object simultaneously.¹³ This inner sense, equal to the transcendence of the Atman and thus the key to freedom, is the ultimately real for Duperron.¹⁴ But for Schopenhauer, the intuitive sense of self as such, as evidence of the will, is not an ennobling trait. The difference between epistemological illusion and an inner sense of a higher reality – enthusiastically affirmed by Duperron – is not constitutive for Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer distinguishes between the real and the ideal, but neither is outside the realm of Maya, and just as he discarded the idea of divine love present in the *Oupnek'hat*, he discards the idea of Atman as an entity which can penetrate the veil of Maya.

The first stages of Schopenhauer's reflections and reconceptualizations of themes related to Maya are apparent in his manuscripts from as early as 1814, in drafts for the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. There he writes of the "Maja of the Indians" as a synonym for the delusion of life, of the senses, which constitute the human being and to which it is subject, just as it is subject to death and sin. The young Schopenhauer states that for us as humans, this delusion is the truth – and only to the "better consciousness" is it delusion (HN 1, 14f.). In his early manuscripts Schopenhauer refers to "better consciousness" as outside of space and time, as outside of the phenomenal world of the *principium individuationis*. This "better consciousness" is not dissimilar to the Atman invoked by Duperron in *De Kantismo*. But from 1815 he more or less stopped using this term. Instead, a new concept is employed, the "pure subject of knowing" (*das reine Subjekt des Erkennens*). It has a much narrower application, because its perception only extends to the Ideas. While it becomes productive in art and may even allow brief glimpses of

¹² Kurbel, *Jenseits des Satzes vom Grund*, 151–60, dedicates a chapter to its main themes, and I follow her exposition. Given Schopenhauer's enthusiasm for the *Oupnek'hat*, Kurbel writes that it is not unlikely that Schopenhauer read *De Kantismo*, even though he does not mention it.

¹³ Ibid., 157. ¹⁴ Ibid., 159; App, "Required Reading," 77.

virtual freedom, the “pure subject of knowing” is limited to a momentary, fleeting comprehension of singular aspects of the *principium individuationis*.

In any event, the term “better consciousness,” which is present in Schopenhauer’s manuscripts from 1811, and quite often in 1813 and 1814, ceases to feature as the antagonist to Maya in *The World as Will and Representation*. Instead, Schopenhauer refers to relative nothingness, an idea he gleaned from reading about *Nieban* (or *Nirwana*, in his later usage), discussed in the next section. For now, we note that Schopenhauer decided to retain the aspects of Maya as illusion and fetter, but without giving it a positive counterpart, such as Atman or “better consciousness.” Any form of cognizance (*Erkenntnis*), and this includes the “pure subject of knowing,” is a function of cognition (*Erkennen*), and thus secondary to the will. This may not be as obvious as it ought to be, because cognizance and cognition play an ambiguous role in *The World as Will and Representation*. From the following translated passage cognition could be understood to possess independent agency for the quieting of the will in an individual no longer deceived by the “veil of Maja”:

The will emerges violently in this individual, more weakly in this other, it is brought to its senses and attenuated by the light of cognition more over here, less over there, until finally, in isolated cases, this cognition, clarified and intensified through suffering itself, reaches the point where it is no longer deceived by appearance, the veil of *māyā*; it sees through the form of appearance, the *principium individuationis*, and the egoism that rests on this principle slowly dies away, so that *motives* that had previously been so violent lose their power, and in their place, complete cognition of the essence of the world acts as a *tranquillizer* of the will and leads to resignation, the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life. (WWR 1, 303; SW 2, 299)

Cognition, “clarified and intensified through suffering itself” apparently leads to “complete cognition of the essence of the world” and thus works as a “*tranquillizer* of the will.” Yet this is not quite how it comes about, and it seems as if cognition, in this usage, has inherited some of the assumptions Schopenhauer earlier associated with “better consciousness.” For here the story of cessation is narrated in the wrong order, from the point of view of cognition, when elsewhere Schopenhauer states clearly that cessation of willing is not a matter of choice. Cognition, upon which insight is based, is secondary to willing and affected by it:

Now as we have seen, the *self-abolition* of the will begins with cognition, but cognition and insight as such are independent of free choice; consequently, that negation of the will, that entrance into freedom cannot be forced by any intention or resolution, but rather emerges from the innermost relation of

cognition to willing in human beings, and thus arrives suddenly, as if flying in from outside. (WWR 1, 432; SW 2, 478–9)

Given that, in individual experience, will and cognition arise simultaneously due to their “innermost relation,” it could appear as if they were equally decisive, and the twofold nature of the world as will and representation could be mistaken to be one of equal halves. But this is not in line with Schopenhauer, for whom will is the determiner for cognition.¹⁵ This implies that cognition, or a function associated with it, cannot form a positive counterpart, such as a “better consciousness,” to the will.

This preordained containment dynamic sets Schopenhauer’s world system in stark opposition to the Vedantic formula, which sets Maya against Atman, the individual soul in union with the powerful unconditioned highest truth, Brahman. While Dara Shukoh, Sufi mystic and syncretic universalist in the best sense of the term, thought the subsumption of all the troubled aspects of Maya possible, as the love of God, and while even Duperron could propose an inner sense of self and its volitional independence, Schopenhauer saw clearly the existential wrong which feels right, or, in psychological terms, the delusion which accompanies cognition by default. Cognition as function of the will under the sway of Maya implies that feelings of pleasure, displeasure or boredom exert pressure on the individual, which leads it to action, but none of this is for cognition to decide: Cognition simply adjusts itself to the momentum generated by the will in response to motives. The dual nature of falsification and fetter are never truly separate, because cognition, falsified as it may be, is a by-product of the will and therefore subject to it – there is no place outside of the will, Maya is the world. It is to Schopenhauer’s credit that he does not proclaim an easy way to dissolve this existential fetter, and that he distanced himself from the possibility of theistic (mis-)interpretations by abandoning the earlier conception of the “better consciousness.”

The closest empirical means toward piercing the veil of Maya described in the early manuscripts is the appreciation of death. In the manuscript from 1814, Schopenhauer states that sanctification was a difficult task, and that life would

¹⁵ At times Schopenhauer seems to have been undecided on this point in his main work. Note the ambivalence in the following passage: “The difference that we have presented by means of two paths is whether this recognition is called into existence by suffering that is merely and purely *cognized*, and which is freely approached by our seeing through the *principium individuationis*, or whether, on the other hand, recognition comes from one’s own immediate *feeling* of suffering” (WWR 1, 424; SW 2, 470). While Schopenhauer writes of two paths, the path of cognition and the path of feeling, we can safely assume that feeling is the more determining factor of the two – otherwise the right perspective (resulting from cognition) would envelop the wrong perspective (resulting from feeling). A model which establishes the superiority of cognition defeats the purpose of overcoming Maya, which endures as long as it is felt, as an existential fetter.

have to be given up if the delusion were to be given up. But even though life can be given up only with the help of death, death itself is insufficient to destroy delusion, as it affects only its visible form, the body (HN I, 104). Death, and its recollection, is a recurrent theme in Schopenhauer's writing, as it is in the passage discussed earlier, according to which individuation "maintains the will for life in that error concerning its own essence: it is the *Maya* of Brahmanism." The passage continues with a reference to death: "Death is a refutation of this error and eliminates it. I believe that, at the moment of dying, we become aware that a mere deception has limited our existence to our person" (WWR 2, 617; SW 3, 691). In the glimpse beyond one's individuality, one becomes aware of the deception, but it is too late to overcome it; clearly, the existential problem of will as *Maya* is not solved by death, even though recollection of death's inevitability points in the direction of a solution. As will be shown in the next section, Schopenhauer found the solution to this conundrum in an explanation given by a Burmese Buddhist abbot in 1763, which was reported in the sixth volume of the *Asiatick Researches*.

2 Nieban

Maya is mentioned quite often in *The World as Will and Representation*, but *Nieban* (or *Nirwana*)¹⁶ occurs only a couple of times. Nevertheless, it had a most pronounced effect on Schopenhauer's system.¹⁷

¹⁶ In a long footnote on Nirvana at the very end of chapter 41 in the second volume, Schopenhauer lists several historical meanings for Nirvana, such as "stilling of the wind," "without life," "no sinful desires," "escaped from sorrow," "the opposite of Samsara," "complete disappearance" (WWR 2, 525; SW 3, 583). The *Pali English Dictionary* gives further explanation: "Only in the older texts do we find references to a simile of the *wind* and the flame; but by far the most common metaphor and that which governs the whole idea of nibbāna finds expression in the putting out of *fire* by *other* means of extinction than by blowing, which latter process rather tends to incite the fire than to extinguish it. The going out of the fire may be due to covering it up, or to depriving it of further fuel, by not feeding it, or by withdrawing the cause of its production. Thus to the *Pali* etymologist the main reference is to the root *vr̥* (to cover), and *not* to *vā* (to blow). . . . Nibbāna is purely and solely an *ethical* state, to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight. It is therefore not transcendental. The first and most important way to reach N. is by means of the eightfold Path, and all expressions which deal with the realization of emancipation from lust, hatred and illusion apply to *practical* habits and not to speculative thought. N. is realized in one's *heart*; to measure it with a speculative measure is to apply a wrong standard." "The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary," <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/pali/>. This interpretation is substantiated further by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Nibbana," *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, March 8, 2011: "Thus the image underlying nibbana is one of freedom. The Pali commentaries support this point by tracing the word nibbana to its verbal root, which means 'unbinding,'" www.accesstoinight.org/lib/aut_hors/thanissaro/nibbana.html. For a detailed study on Nibbana, see Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ This section makes use of a German article by the author on Schopenhauer's reading of the *Asiatick Researches*: Stephan Atzert, "Schopenhauer und seine Quellen: Zum Buddhismusbild in den frühen Asiatick Researches," *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 88 (2007): 15–27.

Nieban is the transliteration of a Pali¹⁸ term Schopenhauer encountered in the essay “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas” by Francis Buchanan, in the sixth volume of the *Asiatick Researches*,¹⁹ which he had borrowed from the Royal Library in Dresden from April 2–13, 1816 and from which he took substantial excerpts.²⁰ Here Schopenhauer encountered the negative definition of freedom from suffering which became relative nothingness in his system, synonymous with freedom from Maya. It is the result of the denial of the will and a synonym for the quieting of the will. The history of Schopenhauer’s reception of this Indian idea is as fascinating as that of Maya, discussed in the previous section.

The *Asiatick Researches* were first published in 1788. They achieved a certain popularity and were translated into French and German.²¹ Their popularity was due to wide interest in Sanskrit literature among the reading public, whereas Buchanan’s report – so important for Schopenhauer – went more or less unnoticed: “What failed to excite any interest at all was the information Buchanan brought back regarding the religion of the Burmese.”²² That it did excite Schopenhauer shows his competency in English due to a longer stay in England during his youth, but also reveals him to have been an attentive reader. He picked up an essay, otherwise overlooked at the time, by a writer who can be deemed the

¹⁸ Pali is the ecclesiastical language used for the Theravada-Canon and its commentaries. The following synopsis is worth noting – K. R. Norman, *Pali Literature including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All Hinayana Schools of Buddhism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), if.: “The dialect of Middle Indo-Aryan which is found in the texts of the Theravadin Buddhists and usually called ‘Pali’ by European scholars is nowhere so called in the Theravadin canon. The word *pali* is found in the chronicles and the commentaries upon the canon, but there it has the meaning of ‘canon’ and is used in the sense of a canonical text or phrase as opposed to the commentary upon it. . . . It would seem that the name ‘Pali’ is based upon a misunderstanding of the compound *pali-bhasa* ‘language of the canon’ where the word *pali* was taken to stand for a particular *bhasa* as a result of which the word was applied to both the canon and commentaries. There is evidence that this misunderstanding occurred several centuries ago.” Nevertheless, the language for transmission of the canon (i.e. Pali) was relatively fixed in the oral tradition before it was written down in Sri Lanka in the first century BC.

¹⁹ *Asiatick Researches, or, Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia*, 5th edition, London 1806.

²⁰ Urs App, “Notes and Excerpts by Schopenhauer Related to Volumes 1–9 of the *Asiatick Researches*,” *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 79 (1998): 21.

²¹ On the impact of the *Asiatick Researches* in France and Germany, see Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, originally published 1950), 52–7. Schwab reports that the first six volumes were published in French in 1803, while four volumes appeared in German translation between 1795–7 (ibid., 56). Similarly, Schwab (ibid., 67) notes that Friedrich Schlegel’s “Von der indischen Bildung” in his famous tract *Über die Weisheit und Sprache der Inder* was based on the French translations.

²² Charles Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs* (London: John Murray, 2002), 14.

most significant Buddhist scholar of his generation. The Scottish surgeon Francis Buchanan²³ had been part of an envoy to the court in Ava (Burma) in 1795. His essay “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas” contains relevant information about Buddhism in Burma and is partly compendium, partly report, with comments by the author. What could be gleaned from it about *Nieban* was authentic, and Schopenhauer read and made excerpts from Buchanan by 1816.

Much later, in “On the Will in Nature,”²⁴ he quotes from Buchanan’s essay because it gave weight to his conviction that a creator-god is not a necessary foundation for morality. Even more importantly for Schopenhauer, Buchanan’s essay held the key to “relative nothingness,” which is the closest thing we have to a cosmological analogy of the quietened will. That key is contained in Buchanan’s translation of excerpts from a Latin text which the leader of the envoy of the East India Company, Captain Michael Symes, had received from the Barnabite missionary Vincentius Sangermano in 1795 and subsequently passed on to Francis Buchanan. Sangermano lived in Rangoon from 1783 to 1808 and had translated into Latin the answers of the king’s sayadaw to questions posed by the bishop of Ava in 1763.²⁵ Buchanan incorporates commented passages from the account under the title “A Short View of the Religion of Godama” into his essay.²⁶ In this thirdhand source – the sayadaw, Sangermano and Buchanan – Schopenhauer encounters the definition of *Nieban*, which forms the basis of his concept of relative nothingness. Specifically, he encounters it in the sayadaw’s answer to the question of what *Nieban* means, of which Godama (the Buddha Gautama) taught the following:

A. When a person is no longer subject to any of the following miseries, namely, to weight,²⁷ old age, disease and death, then he is said to have

²³ Francis Buchanan (1762–1829) also worked as a botanist and surveyor. Allen (ibid., 90f.) reports that in 1811 Buchanan rediscovered and surveyed Bodhgaya (ibid., 100). Buchanan’s report on Bodhgaya, part of his survey of Bihar for the East India Company, was not published in the *Asiatick Researches*, but was kept in the archives of the East India Company until 1838. Buchanan’s historic role is described in Allen (ibid., in particular chapter 5, “Dr Buchanan and the Messengers from Ava,” 75–101 and chapter 1, “The Botanising Surgeon,” 8–21).

²⁴ Francis Buchanan, “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas,” *Asiatick Researches* 6 (1799): 255, cited in the chapter on sinology in *On the Will in Nature* (WN, 433 note; SW 4, 131 note).

²⁵ The original text is the protocol of the questioning of a “Zarado” (i.e. a Sayadaw) by the bishop of Ava. A “sayadaw” is the Burmese title of an abbot. See David Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 256.

²⁶ The English translation of Sangermano’s *Description of the Burmese Empire* was published in 1833. Schopenhauer bought it in 1853 and references it in WWR 2, 519; SW 3: 576. Until then, Buchanan’s essay was the only source for excerpts from Sangermano’s text.

²⁷ “Weight” refers to birth, in the sense of having a body.

obtained *Nieban*. No thing, no place, can give us an adequate idea of *Nieban*: we can only say, that to be free from the four abovementioned miseries, and to obtain salvation, is *Nieban*. In the same manner, as when any person labouring under a severe disease, recovers by the assistance of medicine, we say he has obtained health: but if any person wishes to know the manner, or cause of his thus obtaining health, it can only be answered, that to be restored to health signifies no more than to be recovered from disease. In the same manner only can we speak of *Nieban*, and after this manner GODAMA taught.²⁸

Nieban is not a mystical experience in which birth, old age, disease and death disappear, yet the individual is no longer subject to those miseries, from which all other, secondary and further ailments and forms of stress derive. Earlier we discussed how Schopenhauer likens being subject to those miseries to being in the clutches of Maya. Here, we note that the focus has shifted away from the disease – *Nieban* is compared to health, which requires neither improvement nor definition. Schopenhauer makes use of this description in the last pages of the fourth book:

We can look at the lives and the conduct of saints; of course we rarely encounter them in our own experience, but they are brought before our eyes in their recorded histories as well as in art, which is vouchsafed by the mark of inner truth; and this is how we must drive away the dark impression of that nothing that hovers behind all virtue and holiness as the final goal, and that we fear the way children fear darkness. We must not evade it through myths and meaningless words as the Indians do, words such as “re-absorption into *Brahman*”, or the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists. Instead we confess quite freely: for everyone who is still filled with the will, what remains after it is completely abolished is certainly nothing. But conversely, for those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing. (WWR I, 439; SW 2, 487)

Two strands of meaning in this reversal of positive and negative are worth noting. First, Schopenhauer refers to the “lives and the conduct of saints,” and to art, to vouchsafe for the positive nature of the kind of nothingness he has in mind. The second lies in the reversal of positions, where the desire for the world ceases, and bewilderment on account of its ongoing proliferation (brought on by the will as Maya) is no longer possible. This does not bring time and space as forms of cognition to an end – but greed, hatred and delusion cease, they become meaningless and cannot be entertained,

²⁸ Buchanan “On the Religion,” 266. Allen, *The Buddha and the Sahibs*, 78, notes that Buchanan completed this essay late in 1797.

because the desire which forms assumptions about the world, about one's life, about the next moment, has ceased, has stopped exerting its inevitable pull.

In Schopenhauer's manuscripts from 1816 the *Asiatick Researches* are still mentioned as the source for the idea of *Nieban* (*Nirwana*); he writes about the need to face nothingness, "instead of avoiding it, like the Indians, who put meaningless words in its stead, the Brahmins reabsorption in the primordial spirit, the Buddhists *Nieban* (see *asiatick researches* and *Upnek'hat*)" (HN 1, 411, my translation). Given the extent to which Schopenhauer develops the theme of nothingness around Buchanan's account of "the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists," the designation "meaningless words" is hardly justified. By contrast, it appears that Schopenhauer encountered in the passage about *Nieban* an idea which distinctly shaped his notion of nothingness as an experience outside conventional conceptual categories. He took the analogy of *Nieban* with regained health to mean that the world as will and representation is the miserable counterpart to this other experience:

What is generally accepted as positive, which we call *what is* and whose negation has its most general meaning in the concept we express as *nothing*, is precisely the world of representation, which I have established to be the objecthood of the will, its mirror. This will and this world are what we ourselves are, and representation in general belongs to them as one of their aspects. . . . If the opposite point of view were possible for us, it would involve reversing the signs and showing that what is being for us is nothing, and what is nothing for us is being. (WWR 1, 437; SW 2, 485)

At this point Schopenhauer engages in a dialectical meditation, which could be construed to suggest an ontological commitment to the nothingness resulting from the negation of experience. Indeed, Schopenhauer has been criticized by Ludger Lütkehaus, who agrees with him regarding the doomed character of the world. But Lütkehaus regrets that the radically "negative ontology" suggested by Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism unwarrantedly turns into a positive ontology of nothingness, which, charged with positive significance, takes up the place of the *summum bonum*, the historically discarded godhead.²⁹ I think it could be argued against Lütkehaus that Schopenhauer had earlier relinquished the concept of "better consciousness." If he did so for good, the positive emphasis associated with nothingness needs to be considered not in the context of

²⁹ Ludger Lütkehaus, *Nichts. Abschied vom Sein, Ende der Angst* (Zürich: Haffmans bei Zweitausendeins, 2003), 198.

“having being” – the fluidity of which is overridden by wrong assumptions, as Schopenhauer makes clear in the above passage – but rather in that of dread and angst associated with its loss. It is therefore quite certain that Schopenhauer does not seek to establish a dialectical ontology of being and nothingness, and that he did not intend to posit the negation as an ontological complement, but rather as the absence of identification with the *principium individuationis*. In other words, the *principium individuationis* continues to exist for the individual concerned, yet it stops being of significance, as there is no holding or grasping of notions of self based on the *principium individuationis*. But this is realized by the individual – it is not a categorial cosmic principle.

Schopenhauer’s perspective of the suffering of the unredeemed will (for which pleasure is also a form of suffering) stays clear of the ontological shadow cast by the duality of the Vedanta – despite the references to Maya in Schopenhauer’s writings – and simply states that freedom from the will is better than suffering in it. After all *Nieban* is not an abstract category of a philosophical system, nor a stratum in a layered existence;³⁰ it is experienced by the wise as the absence of desire, hatred and delusion – the latter have no deluded sense of self to engage with. Thus we can see that Schopenhauer engages with the sober, undetermined aspect of the description of *Nieban*. He also emphasizes its psychological effects. This psychologization is evident in nothingness as the absence of “those constant urges and drives that have no goal or pause,” of the “constant transition from desire to fear and from joy to suffering,” of the “never-satisfied and never-dying hope which are the elements that make up the life-dream of the human being who wills” (WWR 1, 438; SW 2, 486), an absence which coincides with “that peace that is higher than all reason, . . . that completely calm sea of the mind” (WWR 1, 439; SW 2, 486).

The ambiguity, through which nothingness could wrongly be given ontological status, was partly resolved by delegating the effects of the quieting of the will to the field of ethics; but the idea of an ontological status of the will, due to the erroneous conflation of will and thing-in-itself in many passages, persisted in Schopenhauer’s main work. It found expression in the now obsolete rhetorical question of how the will could deny itself. Indeed, in Schopenhauer’s writings the relationship between will and thing in itself is ambivalent: In many passages they are taken as synonyms,

³⁰ For a critique of a categorial concept of Nirvana, see Stephan Atzert, “Zu Eduard von Hartmanns Buddhismusbild,” in *Internationale Mainländer Studien*, Vol. 5, eds. Winfried Müller and Damir Smiljanic (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020), 77–91.

when they should be complements. If something were to lie beyond the will, if suspension of the will were to be possible, the thing-in-itself must encompass more than just the will. Schopenhauer addresses this question in “On the Possibility of Cognizing the Thing in Itself,” chapter 18 of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. There he proposes that the will is merely that aspect of the thing-in-itself which is experienced by the individual. Thus, the will does not have the status of a final principle, but is only an aspect of the thing-in-itself. According to Cross, this is a position not unlike that of Buddhism: The highest truth is a truth of a different order, of a changed perspective, not of two principles in a dualistic opposition.³¹

But these ambiguities and their resolutions do not concern the heart of the matter, they only relate to the manner of articulation. As far as Schopenhauer’s own understanding is concerned, we can assume that he had found certainty in the essay by Buchanan, who clearly states that *Nieban* is neither annihilation nor unity of Atman and Brahman.³² Based on the text received by Sangermano, Buchanan rejects the nihilistic interpretation of Nirvana which Grosiers had proposed in *Description Générale de la Chine* (1787). The sayadaw describes a misguided teaching, according to which all beings had their beginning in the womb and their end in death, apart from which there was to be no *Nieban*: “A third denied the proper *Nieban*, and asserted, that all living beings had their beginning in their mother’s womb, and would have their end in death: and that there is no other *Nieban*, but this death.”³³ Buchanan attributes this view to either intellectual confusion or a case of mistaken identity: “GROSIER, in his account of the *Chinese* religion (II, 222), has either confounded this heretical *Nieban* with the true doctrine of the *Rahans* [Arahants, liberated beings] or else the religion he has described as that of Fo, must be different from that of GODAMA.”³⁴

Elsewhere Buchanan translates a passage by Sangermano, who describes *Nieban* as “annihilation”: “And they [the Burma writings] further allege, that beings are continually revolving in these changes . . . until they have performed such actions as entitle them to *Nieban*, the most perfect of all

³¹ Cross, *Schopenhauer’s Encounter*, 182f.

³² Schopenhauer’s philosophy therefore stands in stark contrast to that of Philipp Mainländer, which rejects relative nothingness and proposes salvation through absolute nothingness, as a result of annihilation in death. See Stephan Atzert, “Philipp Mainländer zwischen Schopenhauers Nirvana und Freuds Todestrieb,” *Mainländer Global: Offenbacher Mainländer-Symposium 2016* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017) 31–47, and the chapter on Philipp Mainländer in Frederic Beiser, *Weltschmerz. Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 201–29.

³³ Buchanan, “On the Religion,” 267. ³⁴ *Ibid.*

stages, consisting in a kind of annihilation, in which beings are free from change, misery, death, sickness, or old age.”³⁵ Buchanan criticizes this reference to *Nieban* as “annihilation” made by his source, his friend, the missionary Sangermano: “Annihilation used in the text by my friend, and in general by missionaries, when treating on this subject, is a very inaccurate term. *Nieban* implies the being exempted from all the miseries incident to humanity, but by no means annihilation.”³⁶ But the absence of annihilation does not imply the presence of a divine entity: “Neither does *Nieban* imply absorption into the divine essence; a doctrine common I believe to PLATO and the *Brahmens*, and probably borrowed from the *Magi*. The sect of GODAMA esteem the opinion of a divine being, who created the universe, to be highly impious.”³⁷

Buchanan’s main point is the lack of annihilation in nothingness, “which we fear as children do the dark,” but without affirming God: The exemption from suffering is the only goal and end point. We find Schopenhauer’s familiarity with this fact in a general statement in the *Critique of Kantian Philosophy*: “That Buddhism, in particular, this numerically most highly represented religion on earth, contains altogether no theism, indeed shudders at the thought, is a matter entirely settled” (WWR I, 562). It is easy to appreciate the extent to which Buchanan’s authority, evident in the clarity of his positions, influenced Schopenhauer and led him to adopt similar stances with conviction. In Buchanan’s essay, Schopenhauer also found it asserted that the Buddha was a historical person, that his teaching preceded that of the Brahmins and that Buddhism spread over the entire subcontinent:

It is true that the various accounts of GODAMA, said to be given in the legends of the different nations following his religion, agree so little together, that they can hardly be made matter of historical evidence. But many of these differences may have arisen from the mistakes of travellers; and it is only by procuring faithful translations of the different legends, that we can be enabled to determine what credit is due to their contents. In the mean time I must say that I know of no plausible reason for believing that GODAMA did not exist, and was not an *Indian* prince, as his followers universally allege.³⁸

From the same source, Schopenhauer also knew of the fact that Brahmanism and Buddhism are two fundamentally different world views in an, at times, strained relationship: “Mr. CHAMBERS, the most judicious of our *Indian* antiquaries, has given very good reason for believing that the

³⁵ Ibid., 180. ³⁶ Ibid. ³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Ibid., 257.

worship of BOUDDHA once extended all over *India*, and was not rooted out by the *Brahmens* in the *Decan* so late as the ninth, or even as the twelfth century of the *Christian* era.”³⁹ That Brahmanism played a leading role in exterminating Buddhism is now a well-known historical fact. In his report, Buchanan even compares Buddhism and the religion of the Vedas:

We find them [the brahmins] about the time of CHRIST gaining a superiority over the worshippers of the BOUDDHA; and about nine hundred years afterwards, we find them totally overthrowing his doctrine of its native country. That the *Vedas*, which are commonly supposed to be the oldest books of the *Brahmens*, are inferior in antiquity to the time of the BOUDDHA, is evident from the mention they make of that personage.⁴⁰

Schopenhauer was aware of the fundamental difference between Buddhism and Brahmanism early on, as is apparent when he writes of the Buddhists “who do not themselves believe in either the *Veda* or the caste system” (WWR 1, 383; SW 2, 421).

Of course Schopenhauer was not interested in the conflict between Brahmanism and Buddhism,⁴¹ and he mentions brahmins and Buddhists in the same context, in order to highlight the universality of his philosophy. Still, Buchanan’s assertion of Buddhism as the older religion was also of great interest to him, because it supported his – undoubtedly problematic – idea of *philosophia perennis* pertaining to an original, primordial, and therefore older, wisdom of humanity.

Having surveyed *Maja* and *Nieban* in Schopenhauer’s main work,⁴² we can now refine our introductory statement that *Maja* and *Nieban* seem to form two halves of *The World as Will and Representation*. In fact they do not: *Maja* is the world and *Nieban* refers to that which lies beyond will and representation, in the domain of the thing-in-itself where the will is suspended. Remarkably, the fourth book, the pinnacle of Schopenhauer’s main work, where he outlines the suspension of the

³⁹ Ibid., 163. ⁴⁰ Ibid., 250.

⁴¹ The violent extermination and expulsion of Buddhism from India was not known to Schopenhauer, but, based on Gokhale (below), it does not render invalid in principle a harmonious coexistence, which seems to have been possible during earlier times: “The Buddhist rejection of the Vedic authority, which in the earlier period (500–200 B.C.) did not trouble greatly even *purohitas* [ministers] who declared themselves *upasakas* [lay followers] of the Buddha, now challenged the very basis of the priestly power entrenched in court circles. Accommodation, therefore, was practically impossible, and therewith emerged the Brahminical ire against Buddhism.” B. G. Gokhale, *New Light on Early Buddhism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994), 39.

⁴² According to Zöllner, Schopenhauer’s use of *Tat tvam asi* (“Thou art that”) follows a much simpler structure of appropriation and does not reflect an ancient Indian ethics of compassion. Günter Zöllner, “Anerkennung. Der außerindische Ursprung von Schopenhauers unindischer Auffassung des ‘tat tvam asi’,” *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* 93 (2012): 99.

principium individuationis, closes with a perspective from a point outside the world as will and representation – or, more precisely, one which contains the world as will and representation, albeit surmounts it. The fourth book puts into relief the previous three books and presents them as necessary, but inferior, perspectives. This mode of thinking about the world was inspired by and indebted to the description of *Nieban* in the *Asiatick Researches*. The fact that Schopenhauer called himself a “Buddhaist” later in life – he never referred to himself as a Vedantin – is the result of this first and favorable impression of Buddhism and the understanding he was able to develop by reading about *Nieban* in the *Asiatick Researches*.

*Schopenhauer, Universal Guilt, and Asceticism
as the Expression of Universal Compassion*

Robert Wicks

Even among more hardened and embittered souls, Schopenhauer's view that it would have been better had the world not existed, must strike a disturbing chord. Among those who love the world, savor its beauty, laugh and feel inspired on a daily basis, his nihilistic attitude must seem misguided. Schopenhauer refers to himself proudly as a pessimist, but when taken to the extreme, his attitude toward the physical world is nihilistic: He concludes the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* with the statement that for those who are truly liberated "in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing" (WWR I, 439).

Asking why Schopenhauer was steadfast in his devaluation of the spatiotemporal world can help clarify some central questions in his philosophy such as: (1) the extent to which we can have metaphysical knowledge; (2) whether his final prescription of asceticism is reasonably subject to the criticism that it is selfishly individualistic; and (3) among the influences of Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism, which of these religions, if any, most closely illuminates his primary motives and values.

To answer these questions, this essay will draw implications from Schopenhauer's characterization of the ordinary world as a "hell," "penitentiary," "penal colony," and "prison," from which only a fortunate few escape. Central to this inquiry will be the role of guilt in his outlook. The conclusions will be that Schopenhauer's most consistent position is to maintain that we can have virtually complete metaphysical knowledge; that his advocacy of asceticism is not selfishly individualistic, but universally compassionate; and that although his outlook is inspired by Christianity in its emphasis upon universal guilt, his final position is that of an independent mystic. These conclusions are characteristic of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, the first edition of which was published in 1818.

Regarding Schopenhauer's mysticism, there are two interpretive options. It can be understood in terms of a Buddhistic conception of enlightenment that is consistent with the claim that the thing-in-itself (i.e. ultimate reality) is nothing more than an inanimate, senseless energy that is best called "Will"; it can also be understood in terms of a Christian, as well as Hindu, mystical standpoint that coheres with the claim that the thing-in-itself has significant aspects that are not Will. Schopenhauer's writings display a constant sympathy with Christian mysticism, and from 1820 onwards he admits that this type of mysticism requires us to postulate aspects of the thing-in-itself that are not Will. It will nonetheless be argued here that his thought obtains a more consistent and profound interpretation if the mystical experience that results from the extreme denial of the Will is conceived Buddhistically, to yield what can be seen to be a remarkable, metaphysically penetrating expression of Buddhist compassion.

1 The Thing-in-Itself as Will

Before considering the role of guilt, it is important to clarify Schopenhauer's claim that the world is "Will," for it admits of different interpretations. The difficulty is not whether or not Schopenhauer states that ultimate reality (or as he tends to say following Kant, the "thing-in-itself") is a senseless and blind "Will," the being of which is independent of space and time, but whether he intended this claim to be: (1) a definitive metaphysical claim, without any expectation that it would be subject to substantial revision; (2) the expression of a merely human effort to characterize what is ultimately real that could be mostly mistaken and open to substantial revision; or (3) understood as falling somewhere between these extremes.

To put this question into perspective, there is a thought-provoking section from Schopenhauer's 1820–21 notebooks, written only a couple of years after he published *The World as Will and Representation* and reiterated virtually word-for-word almost a quarter of a century later in the second volume of the work (1844). The two versions are as follows:

[1820–21] Therefore we can still always raise the question as to what ultimately the *will* itself *is in itself*, in other words what it is apart from its presenting itself as *will*, that is to say apart from its appearing generally and hence its being *known* in general. Obviously this question can *never* be answered, for, as I have said already, being-known conflicts with the thing-in-itself and every known thing is already as such a phenomenon. But the existence of this question tells us that this very thing-in-itself, which we can

never know more clearly than when we know it as *will*, may have, quite apart from all possible phenomenon, definitions, properties and modes of existence which for us are simply unknowable and inconceivable, and which constitute the very existence of the thing-in-itself after it has freely abolished itself as *will*, as I have taught in the fourth book. This will has stepped entirely out of the phenomenon and for our knowledge, that is to say in contrast to the world of phenomena, has passed over into empty nothingness. – If the will were absolutely the thing-in-itself, this nothingness would be absolute instead of being just a relative nothingness as I have described it. (MR 3, 40–41)

[1844] Accordingly, even after this last and extreme step, the question may still be raised what that will, which manifests itself in the world and as the world, is ultimately and absolutely in itself; in other words, what it is, quite apart from the fact that it manifests itself as *will*, or in general *appears*, that is to say, *is known* in general. This question can *never* be answered, because, as I have said, being-known of itself contradicts being-in-itself, and everything that is known is as such only phenomenon. But the possibility of this question shows that the thing-in-itself, which we know most immediately in the will, may have, entirely outside all possible phenomenon, determinations, qualities, and modes of existence which for us are absolutely unknowable and incomprehensible, and which then remain as the inner nature of the thing-in-itself, when this, as explained in the fourth book, has freely abolished itself as *will*, has thus stepped out of the phenomenon entirely, and as regards our knowledge, that is to say as regards the world of phenomena, has passed over into empty nothingness. If the will were positively and absolutely the thing-in-itself, then this nothing would be *absolute*, instead of which it expressly appears to us there only as a *relative* nothing. (WWR 2, 197)¹

These excerpts contain two independent reasons why our knowledge of the thing-in-itself is not absolute. The first is Kantian: Our very way of knowing – an activity of the particular structure of our minds – interferes with the clarity of our apprehension of the thing-in-itself. We consequently perceive it translucently rather than transparently. The second reason concerns what Schopenhauer believes to be the implications of the ascetic denial-of-the will: If the complete denial of the will were to occur, and if reality, and hence consciousness, were Will through and through, then there could be no experience of enlightenment but only a transition into nothingness, which is to say that a complete denial of the Will would entail a loss of consciousness and no experience at all. If mystical experience

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume II, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966).

involves the apprehension of a higher reality by means of the complete absence of Will, then to establish a metaphysical ground that renders such an experience possible, it (supposedly) must relate to an aspect of the thing-in-itself that is not Will.

In reference to the first reason, Schopenhauer states that we know the thing-in-itself as Will through “the lightest of veils [*allerleichtesten Verhüllung*]” (SW 3, 221), acknowledging that although our knowledge is independent of the forms of space and causality, it remains dependent upon the form of time.² One way to imagine his reference to the “lightest of veils” is to say that our apprehension of the thing-in-itself compares to looking at an ordinary object through a pair of sunglasses or colored cellophane: Aside from some color distortion, we can see exactly what the object looks like. We cannot see the object’s colors accurately, but this does not interfere with our ability to identify clearly what we are looking at. Such a translucent, close to transparent, apprehension is consistent with the assumption that the thing-in-itself is entirely Will, and is “one” and internally undifferentiated. Apprehending the thing-in-itself accordingly through the lightest of veils, we can apprehend the essence of the thing-in-itself and have a clear idea of its ultimate nature, namely, that it is Will, despite how we cannot apprehend it in an absolute or complete sense.

The second reason does not allow that the thing-in-itself could be entirely Will. Rather, aspects of the thing-in-itself are admitted that are not Will and that “remain as the inner nature of the thing-in-itself, when this [i.e., the ascetic consciousness] . . . has freely abolished itself as *will*” and has entered into “nothingness” from the perspective of those who remain observingly in the spatiotemporal world. Schopenhauer describes this “nothingness” as a “relative nothing,” presuming, as noted, that if the thing-in-itself were entirely Will and if the nothingness entered into were absolute, then experience itself would end when the ascetic completely denies the Will. Since mystical experience occurs, Schopenhauer infers that there must be a non-Will metaphysical reality that renders the experience possible.

There is consequently a difference in scope between the two reasons Schopenhauer uses to explain why our knowledge of the thing-in-itself is

² *Verhüllung* can be translated as “veil,” “covering,” “mask,” “drape,” “cloak,” or “disguise.” Schopenhauer refers here to the “very lightest” (*allerleichtesten*) veil, covering, etc.: “*in welcher das Ding an sich in der allerleichtesten Verhüllung sich darstellt*” (SW 3, 221). Since the presentation is obscured in the “very lightest” way, that is, it is hardly obscured at all, the most appropriate translation would be “veil,” as opposed to “mask,” “cloak,” or “disguise,” the meanings of which suggest the distinct possibility of significant, and perhaps even complete, deception and misrepresentation.

not absolute: The first is consistent with the thing-in-itself either being entirely Will or not being entirely Will; the second is consistent only with the thing-in-itself not being entirely Will. Any interpretation of Schopenhauer's thought thus needs to determine how to understand the relationship between these two reasons. The straightforward option is to ascribe to Schopenhauer the position for which they are both compatible, namely, that the thing-in-itself is not entirely Will. A less obvious position is to maintain that it would be more consistent for Schopenhauer to maintain that the thing-in-itself is entirely Will, and regard the second reason as a misstep on his part, akin, say, to how Kant referred to the thing-in-itself as an "object" that "causes" our sensations, when he should not have been referring to objects and causes in relation to the thing-in-itself at all (WWR 2, 463–464).

What follows is a set of considerations that support the second position, namely, that Schopenhauer's philosophy acquires its most consistent form when it maintains that thing-in-itself is entirely Will. His claim that the thing-in-itself has non-Will aspects is motivated by explaining how the ascetic's mystical experience is possible, but, as we shall see – perhaps unexpectedly – upon acknowledging that the thing-in-itself is entirely Will, the ascetic's mystical experience is explainable in a way that gives it a more profound metaphysical and moral meaning.

2 Guilt and the Thing-in-Itself as Entirely Will

The influence of Asian thought on Schopenhauer's philosophy remains a subject of debate. Schopenhauer himself claimed that he arrived at his views independently of his discovery of Hinduism and Buddhism and that the coincidence of his outlook with the insights of these ancient religions served simply to confirm, reinforce, and deepen the truth of his own philosophy (WWR 2, 178). It appears nonetheless that Schopenhauer's initial reading of the first sections of the *Bhagavadgita* at the very end of 1813 and of the *Upanishads* in the spring of 1814, helped modify his conception of the Christianity-inspired mystical theism with which he had been identifying (he referred to himself, for instance, as an "illuminated theist" in 1812 [MR 2, 373]) to a nonspecific, universalistic mysticism that, if it introduced the word, "God," used it only metaphorically to refer to an ineffable transcendent experience that dissolves the distinction between subject and object.³

³ Schopenhauer read the first sections of the *Bhagavadgita* in December 1813 at the age of twenty-five, and the *Upanishads* in March 1814 at the age of twenty-six. See Urs App, "Schopenhauer's Initial Encounter with Indian Thought," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 87 (2006): 47–52.

Schopenhauer's detailed knowledge of Buddhism came relatively later in life, but it was impressive enough for him to refer to Buddhism thereafter as the religion with which he most closely identified and that cohered most with his philosophy (WWR 2, 178). In general, however, he felt that his philosophy embodied the shared essence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, and he often referred to these three religions in conjunction with one another, contrasting them with "optimistic" religions such as Judaism and Islam, as well as philosophical views such as those of Leibniz and Hegel (WWR 2, 179).

Among Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, the only religion wherein guilt is a prevailing theme is Christianity, as expressed in the doctrine of original sin. In the following excerpt from the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer refers to St. Augustine's characterization of original sin and maintains that it is central to Christianity, associating it with his own notion of the affirmation of the Will:

He [Augustine] also teaches in his work entitled *Opus Imperfectum*, i, 47, that original sin is sin and punishment at the same time . . . The doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is really the great truth which constitutes the kernel of Christianity, while the rest is in the main only clothing and covering, or something accessory. (WWR I, 405).⁴

If the affirmation of the Will and denial of the Will are the two centers of gravity in Schopenhauer's philosophy – each person is drawn toward one or the other, given the person's character – then as correlates, original sin and salvation (*Erlösung*) can be regarded as the two religious conceptions around which his philosophy turns. The central place of original sin reveals a Christian core to his philosophy, notwithstanding his sympathetic attitude toward Hinduism and Buddhism.

Although it is clear that for Schopenhauer, salvation is attained through the ascetic denial-of-the-Will, it is less clear how original sin – and along with it, the idea of guilt – is crucial to his outlook. It is a significant question because guilt is a conception more salient in Christianity than in

⁴ Translation by E. F. J. Payne. Schopenhauer reiterates the association in WWR 2, 608 (Payne translation):

This original sin itself is in fact the affirmation of the will-to-live; on the other hand, the denial of this will, in consequence of the dawning of better knowledge, is salvation. Therefore, what is moral is to be found between these two; it accompanies man as a light on this path from the affirmation to the denial of will, or mythically, from the entrance of original sin to salvation through faith in the mediation of the incarnate God.

either Hinduism or Buddhism, and yet Schopenhauer never defined himself primarily as a Christian.

The fundamental presence of guilt – the “guilt of existence itself” (WWR I, 281) – arises in relation to the stated nature of the thing-in-itself, namely, as Will. In its endless striving, Will brings suffering into existence when it manifests itself as sentient individuals, for the thing-in-itself as Will is an all-permeating metaphysical impulse that is timeless, aimless, groundless, endlessly striving, ignorant, blind, and wholly present in every phenomenon. Since our ultimate constitution is this impulse, everyone comes into existence as an individual filled with desire, in a condition marked by personal frustration and conflict with other living beings. As Will, we are responsible for the suffering that the world contains, and in this respect “original sin” infects us as individuals.

Assuming that the production of suffering is wrong, all living beings are consequently “born in the wrong” for they are constituted by a being that is itself in the wrong. The following excerpt summarizes the situation:

It will be clear to anyone who has achieved such cognition that the will is the in-itself of all appearance, and that all the misery imposed on others and experienced by himself, all the evil and the trouble, only ever affect one and the same being. This is true even if two beings present themselves in appearance as entirely different individuals, and even if their appearances are far apart in time and space. He sees that the difference between the one who metes out suffering and the one who must endure it is only phenomenal and does not concern the thing in itself, which is the will that lives in both. This will is deceived by the cognition that is bound in its service, and fails to recognize itself; trying to increase well-being in *one* of its appearances, it produces vast amounts of suffering in *another*, and so, in the violence of its impulses, it sinks its teeth into its own flesh, not knowing that it is only hurting itself, and revealing in this way, through the medium of individuation, its inner conflict with itself. The tormenter and the tormented are one. The former is mistaken in thinking he does not share the torment, the latter in thinking he does not share the guilt. (WWR I, 381)

The crucial point here is that “the will is the in-itself of all appearance.”⁵ Were this not metaphysically the case, then there would be no reason to ascribe guilt to tormented and victimized individuals, since the source of

⁵ The claim appears in various places in WWR I: (1) “Nonetheless, because it is everywhere one and the same, – just as the first light of dawn shared the name sunlight with the bright rays of noon, – it must be called *will* here as well as there, a name signifying the being in itself of every thing in the world and the sole kernel of every appearance” (WWR I, 143); (2) “Still, despite the evidence of all these analogies, we must never forget that music has only an indirect relation to them, not a direct one, because it never expresses appearance but only the inner essence, the in-itself of all appearance, the

the tormentor's actions would reside exclusively within the individuality of the tormentor. Such a situation would obtain, for example, if the thing-in-itself were not fundamentally blind, irrational, and morally insensitive Will, but were a benevolent energy in relation to which individuals could behave in a contrary manner through acts of free will, presumably done in ignorance of their true nature.

To render manifestly innocent individuals guilty in accord with the conception of original sin, it is necessary to suppose that their metaphysical being – an aspect that is basic to the individual and beyond the individual's control – is itself morally tainted. And for that to be the case, it is necessary to assume, within the Schopenhauerian context, that the thing-in-itself is Will through and through, or is essentially Will, and that whatever we cannot know about it does not introduce morally mitigating or exonerating factors, just as the colored cellophane through which we perceive an object does not introduce significant doubt with respect to identifying the kind of object we are perceiving.⁶

Now Schopenhauer, having absorbed the contents of Kant's epistemology, admitted from the start, that is, in the first edition (1818) of *The World as Will and Representation* (§18), that we cannot have absolute knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Complicating the situation, however, he also believed – clearly from 1820 onwards, as is evident from the notebook excerpt quoted above – that the state of consciousness associated with ascetic enlightenment requires a metaphysical ground that is non-Will. The first admission clears the way for the second, since the Kantian limitation on knowledge opens up the possibility that the ascetic could be apprehending aspects of the thing-in-itself that are unknowable in the ordinary sense and possibly non-Will, given the ineffable quality of mystical experience and the implied dissolution of the subject-object distinction – a distinction that Schopenhauer recognizes as necessary for knowledge in the ordinary sense.

The extrapolation and one of the clearest expressions of an interpretive approach that accentuates the supposed non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself is found in Moira Nicholls's essay, "The Influences of Eastern

will itself" (WWR 1, 289); (3) "On the other hand, that aspect of my discussion that corresponds to and is somewhat analogous with that prescriptive project is the purely theoretical truth (and the whole of my presentation can be seen as merely a development of this truth), namely, that the will is the in-itself of every appearance, and as such is itself free from the form of appearance, and thus from all multiplicity" (WWR 1, 401).

⁶ This is assuming that, following the analogy, we are referring to common objects such as tables and chairs, where color differences are unimportant.

Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself," where she concludes:

Speculatively, this shift from a strict identity of the thing-in-itself with will to the view that the thing-in-itself as multiple aspects only one of which is will suggests that had Schopenhauer lived longer, he may well have embraced the view that the thing-in-itself is not will at all; rather it is the object of awareness of saints, mystics and those who have denied the will.⁷

Schopenhauer's abiding interest in Christian mysticism lends support to Nicholls's speculation, but the proposition that the thing-in-itself has multiple aspects also has the effect of undermining the pessimism that Schopenhauer strongly advocates. If the thing-in-itself is not absolutely or fundamentally Will – and clearly, if it is not Will at all – there would be no reason to expect that the manifestation of the thing-in-itself would result in a set of selfish beings filled with desire where frustration is the baseline condition of life. There would also be no sense to Schopenhauer's association of original sin with the affirmation of the Will, and no metaphysical ground to his characterizations of the human condition that stand irrevocably as the hallmarks of his philosophy, two of which are as follows:

All *willing* springs from need, and thus from lack, and thus from suffering. Fulfilment brings this to an end; but for every wish that is fulfilled, at least ten are left denied: moreover, desire lasts a long time and demands go on forever; fulfilment is brief and sparsely meted out. But even final satisfaction itself is only illusory: the fulfilled wish quickly gives way to a new one: the former is known to be a mistake, the latter is not yet known to be one. No achieved object of willing gives lasting, unwavering satisfaction; rather, it is only ever like the alms thrown to a beggar that spares his life today so that his agony can be prolonged until tomorrow. – Thus, as long as our consciousness is filled by our will, as long as we are given over to the pressure of desires with their constant hopes and fears, as long as we are the subject of willing, we will never have lasting happiness or peace. Whether we hunt or we flee, whether we fear harm or chase pleasure, it is fundamentally the same: concern for the constant demands of the will, whatever form they take, continuously fills consciousness and keeps it in motion: but without peace, there can be no true well-being. So the subject of willing remains on the revolving wheel of Ixion, keeps drawing water from the sieve of the Danaids, is the eternally yearning Tantalus. (WWR 1, 219–220)

⁷ Moira Nicholls, "The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer's Doctrine of the Thing-in-Itself," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 196.

This basically stems from the fact that the will needs to live off itself because there is nothing outside of it and it is a hungry will. Thus, pursuit, anxiety, and suffering. (WWR, 1 179)

These excerpts – and others like it⁸ – require that the thing-in-itself is thoroughly or essentially Will. Schopenhauer states explicitly in the second excerpt above that “there is nothing outside of it,” so even after 1820 he continues to acknowledge that the thing-in-itself is entirely Will, in this case as late as 1859.⁹

It is not, then, as if Schopenhauer is unaware of the epistemological qualification he needs to make, for he always appreciated that we need to apprehend the thing-in-itself through the form of time. Neither is it that he adopts a position that only “later” (e.g. in the above excerpt from the 1844 edition of WWR 2) introduces the idea of there being non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself, for he presents this possibility in his 1820 notebooks, only a couple of years after the publication of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*.¹⁰ There is a straightforward difficulty regarding whether Schopenhauer’s postulation of multiple aspects of the thing-in-itself makes sense in view of his overall position – which includes the characterization of individual human beings as filled with and driven by will – since he seems to have been of two minds on the matter.

In view of this tension, it helps here to appreciate that with respect to his most clear and characteristic description of the thing-in-itself as “Will” in all editions of Volume One of *The World as Will and Representation* from 1818 onwards, Schopenhauer’s phrasing does not support the postulation of multiple aspects of the thing-in-itself, for this path is virtually excluded by his use of the phrase *denominatio a potiori*. He writes:

⁸ For example, WWR 1, 287.

⁹ “There is nothing outside of it” was added in the third edition of 1859. The German reads: “*Im Grunde entspringt dies daraus, daß der Wille an sich selber muß, weil außer ihm nichts da ist* [because there is nothing outside of it] *und er ein hungriger Wille ist. Daher die Jagd, die Angst und das Leiden*” (SW 2, 183).

¹⁰ J. F. Herbart’s 1820 review of WWR 1 criticizes Schopenhauer for contradicting himself by saying, on the one hand, that the thing-in-itself appears to us as Will and for us is therefore an “appearance,” and, on the other, that we can also know the Will as it is “in itself,” namely, as a being that is not an object, that is outside space and time, and beyond all knowledge. Schopenhauer’s 1820 notebook remark can be seen as a confusion-generating overreaction to Herbart’s criticism, as this essay’s argument would like to suggest. Herbart writes: “*Zugleich wird dieser Wille fuer das Ding an sich erklart, dass als solches nimmer mehr Object ist. – Wie wurde uns aber der Will als solcher bekannt?*” (At the same time, this will as the *thing in itself* is declared *as such* that it is *no longer object*. So how did the Will become known to us *as such*?) Johann Friedrich Herbart, “Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung: vier Bücher, nebst einem Anhang, der die Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie enthält, von Arthur Schopenhauer,” *Hermes oder kritisches Jahrbuch der Literatur* 3 (1820): 143.

Now, if this *thing-in-itself* (we will retain the Kantian expression as a standing formula) – which as such is never object, since all object is its mere appearance or phenomenon, and not it itself – is to be thought of objectively, then we must borrow its name and concept from an object, from something in some way objectively given, and therefore from one of its phenomena. But in order to serve as a point of explanation, this can be none other than the most complete of all its phenomena, i.e., the most distinct, the most developed, the most directly enlightened by knowledge; but this is precisely man's *will*. We have to observe, however, that here of course we use only a *denominatio a potiori*, by which the concept of will therefore receives a greater extension than it has hitherto had. (WWR I, 110–111)¹¹

The phrase *denominatio a potiori* and, similarly, *a potiori fit denominatio*,¹² can be translated as “the name given from the more potent quality,”¹³ or “naming from the stronger,” or the “naming of a group based on the stronger or more dominant member.” One could also say “naming from that which sets the style for the rest,” “naming from the core element,” or as Kant uses the phrase, “denomination from the more important.”¹⁴ The operative word is *potior* (i.e. “stronger”) which signals matters of degree of the same general kind as one extends from the stronger to the weaker instances, like a flame that emanates heat.¹⁵

¹¹ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 314 uses this second phrase to characterize his reference to primordial time in relation to the time of common sense.

¹³ Otto Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation, and Individual* [1946] (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 213.

¹⁴ Kant uses the phrase “*a potiori denominatio*”: “*Und da Zweck mehr als Mittel ist, so geschieht a potiori denominatio*” (Ak. 29:899) (“And since the end is more than the means, denomination from the more important occurs”). Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 266.

¹⁵ Alternatively translating the phrase *denominatio a potiori* in reference to the whole/part relationship, as one might say, “naming the whole according to one of its parts,” fails to capture how *potior* signifies the idea of a continuous gradation from the “stronger” to the “weaker” instances of that which is subsumed under the broadened concept. A part of something does not bear a relationship of “stronger” and “weaker” to the whole in which it is situated and it need not resemble or be continuous in content with the rest of which it is a whole.

Translating the phrase *denominatio a potiori* through the whole/part relationship consequently generates an unreliable interpretation of Schopenhauer's reference to the extended meaning of “Will.” This is because the situation is not analogous to referring to a ship's sail to designate the whole of the ship, as in saying, using metonymy, there were thirty “sails” on the horizon to indicate that there were thirty “boats” on the horizon. The “sail” is not continuous with the rest of the ship in terms of its physical resemblance; it is not a “stronger” aspect of the ship as a whole, where the other parts of the ship are the “weaker” aspects.

Since Schopenhauer uses the phrase *denominatio a potiori* to express his general proposition that “Will” is identical to the thing-in-itself, he cannot be saying that the “stronger” aspect of the thing-in-itself is “Will” and that the “weaker” aspects of the thing-in-itself are its non-Will aspects, since the non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself are *non-Will*, and are not “weaker” aspects of Will in either the strong or extended sense, just as the sails on the ship do not resemble in the slightest the other parts of

As Schopenhauer appropriately uses the phrase, the stronger, most clear and characteristic manifestation of Will – the Will that manifests itself in us – is Will accompanied by knowledge and motives. On this basis, he extends the scope of the word's reference to include weaker manifestations of Will in other living and nonliving beings, namely, manifestations that are not accompanied by knowledge and motives. These present themselves as more of a blind urge and drive without self-consciousness. Will is manifested throughout in matters of degree, where in other living beings and nonliving things it shows itself in a less strong, potent, and explicit way, in contrast to how it appears in humans, since it is not accompanied by knowledge and motives:

For by the word *will*, we will always understand only that species of it hitherto exclusively described by the term, that is to say, the will guided by knowledge, strictly according to motives, indeed only to abstract motives, thus manifesting itself under the guidance of the faculty of reason. This, as we have said, is only the most distinct phenomenon [*die deutlichste Erscheinung*] or appearance of the will. We must now clearly separate out in our thoughts the innermost essence of this phenomenon, known to us directly, and then transfer it to all the weaker, less distinct phenomena of the same essence [*auf alle schwächeren, undeutlicheren Erscheinungen desselben Wesens*], and by so doing achieve the desired extension of the concept of will. (WWR I, 111; SW 2, 132).¹⁶

As is evident from the above passage, Schopenhauer extends the notion of Will from “stronger,” more distinct manifestations to “weaker,” less distinct manifestations of the *same* essence. He is referring throughout to Will and is not considering or speculating about non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself. So Schopenhauer's most clear and characteristic discussion of why he refers to the thing-in-itself as “Will” – a discussion that employs the phrase *denominatio a potiori* and that remains constant in the 1818, 1844, and 1859 editions of *The World as Will and Representation* – does not suggest that he had in mind aspects of the thing-in-itself that are non-Will.¹⁷ Across his writings as a whole, the passages where he says that the thing-in-itself is

the ship that it is used to represent. This latter, questionable way of interpreting Schopenhauer can be found in Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 51. For further elaboration, see note 17 below.

¹⁶ Translation by E. F. J. Payne

¹⁷ The word *denominatio*, considered by itself, can indeed signify a derivative term that has a metonymic relationship to the core term, but it need not bear such a relationship. We find this metonymic relationship in Classical Latin, as in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ca. 80 BCE.; *ad Herennium*, IV.32). In Medieval Latin, the term *denominatio* can be used to express relationships between the core and derivative terms that are not metonymic, but are rather based on etymology, as in the writings of John Buridan (ca. fourteenth century CE, e.g., *Summulae* 1.3.1.). In sum, it is not as if metonymic or whole/part relationships are not part of the way *denominatio* has been used

entirely Will, and where he admits non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself, are relatively equal in textual weight, thus yielding a genuine problem in interpretation.

3 The Impossibility of Complete Will-lessness

Here is the source of the problem, to be clarified in what follows: Schopenhauer is led to claim that the thing-in-itself has non-Will aspects as an upshot of his style of conceptualization that, within some principal contexts within his philosophy, abstracts and idealizes too extremely when it would be accurate to be more realistic. For example, he describes the aesthetic experience of beauty as a condition that is completely will-less, speaking as if someone could actually attain this state of mind:

Thus at the same time, the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure* will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*. (WWR I, 179)¹⁸

In the aesthetic method of consideration we found *two inseparable constituent parts*: namely, knowledge of the object not as individual thing, but as Platonic *Idea*, in other words, as persistent form of this whole species of things; and the self-consciousness of the knower, not as individual, but as *pure, will-less subject of knowledge*. (WWR I, 195)¹⁹

For at the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists. (WWR I, 197)²⁰

Then, instead of the restless pressure and effort; instead of the constant transition from desire to apprehension and from joy to sorrow; instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope that constitutes the life-dream of the man who wills, we see that peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-life calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquillity, that unshakeable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Correggio, is a complete and certain gospel. Only knowledge remains; the will has vanished. (WWR I, 411)²¹

historically; it is that Schopenhauer's use of *denominatio a potiori* does not cohere with this, since the idea of *potior* more specifically and precisely involves a relationship of "stronger/weaker" or "more distinct/less distinct," consistent with how the term *denominatio* was understood during Buridan's time. I am grateful to Boaz Schuman for these subtle points and references, and for discussions about the differences between Classical and Medieval Latin.

¹⁸ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

¹⁹ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

²⁰ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

²¹ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

If, however, one's body – that is, one's heart, lungs, liver, blood, etc. – is a manifestation of Will, then a condition of complete will-lessness is impossible if one is to remain alive. When Schopenhauer refers to complete will-lessness it would be more accurate and realistic to say that the energies of Will as manifested in one's body and consciousness have been minimized to the point where one's consciousness is dominated by a feeling of deep tranquility. In the experience of beauty, which Schopenhauer describes as a temporary version of ascetic will-lessness, the tranquility arises from the awareness of timeless Ideas, which he characterizes as immediate objectifications of Will. Note how the tranquility is not explained in reference to a person's coming into contact with aspects of the thing-in-itself that are non-Will.

Schopenhauer does recognize that a completely will-less condition is impossible when he describes not aesthetic experience, but the more extreme ascetic experience that arises from the denial-of-the-will. In the passage below, after continuing to refer to aesthetic experience as will-less, he describes ascetic experience as an intensification of the tranquil state of mind that aesthetic experience provides, and admits more precisely that even in the case of the ascetic as a "pure knowing being," Will has not been entirely extinguished, but extinguished *almost* entirely, with only the weakest presence of Will remaining sufficient to sustain the ascetic's basic physiological processes:

It will be remembered from the third book that aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists, to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual that knows in the interest of its constant willing, the correlative of the particular thing to which objects become motives, but the eternal subject of knowing purified of the will, the correlative of the Idea. And we know that these moments, when, delivered from the fierce pressure of the will, we emerge, as it were, from the heavy atmosphere of the earth, are the most blissful that we experience. From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever, indeed completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it. Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world. (WWR 1, 390)²²

²² Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

Supplementing this point is Schopenhauer's account of the nature of consciousness itself, independently of whether its quality happens to be ordinary, aesthetic, or ascetic, as dependent upon bodily functions and in particular, the brain:

For consciousness does indeed perish in death, but by no means does that which produced it until then. That is, consciousness is based on the intellect, but this in turn on a physiological process. For it is obviously the function of the brain and therefore conditioned by the interaction of the nervous and vascular systems, or more precisely, by the brain which is nourished, animated and constantly shaken by the heart . . . An *individual consciousness*, thus a consciousness as such, is inconceivable in an *incorporeal being*, because the condition of any consciousness, knowledge, is necessarily a function of the brain – actually, because the intellect manifests itself objectively as brain. (PP 2, 246)

Since the body is the objectification of Will, and since consciousness cannot be detached from brain functioning, there can be no consciousness without it being a manifestation of Will. There are degrees of intensity, but the proposition that there could be a state of consciousness that is entirely will-less is an idealization that cannot be realized. As we will see, far from creating a philosophical impasse, this renders Schopenhauer's view more profound and morally significant than might otherwise be thought.

4 Quietism versus Buddhism: Two Kinds of Mysticism

In 1812, before he read the *Bhagavadgita* in late 1813 and the *Upanishads* in early 1814, Schopenhauer referred to himself as an “illuminated theist” (MR 2, 373) who sought states of consciousness that can be grasped only through “intellectual intuition” (MR 1, 27). He also spoke theistically of the “Kingdom of God” as a moral ideal (MR 1, 16). At the time, he was developing the idea of a higher state of awareness that he referred to as a “better consciousness” (*besseres Bewußtsein*) – a transcendent, mystical awareness wherein the subject–object distinction is dissolved. Throughout his writings, he recognizes the highest state of awareness as a condition that dissolves the subject–object distinction, associating it in his early writings with the better consciousness and expressing it then with a theistic resonance.

By the time he published *The World as Will and Representation* in 1818, Schopenhauer described mystical awareness with less theistic resonance in reference to the ascetic's denial-of-the-will, although as examples he continued to use Christian quietists such as Miquel de Molinos (1628–96) and

Madame Guyon (1648–1717). As late as 1859, a year before he died, and at that point familiar with Buddhism, he wrote in the margins of his copy of the third edition of *The World as Will and Representation* that the ascetic's mystical state of awareness characterized by the dissolution of the subject–object distinction is the same as that held by Buddhists in their own conception of enlightenment – the “beyond of all knowledge” – as expressed in the Prajñāpāramitā sutras (WWR I, 439).

Throughout these shifts in description, the constant theme is Schopenhauer's recognition and promotion of a mystical state of consciousness that involves the dissolution of the subject–object distinction. Notable, in particular, is his reference to Meister Eckhart, whose works he was reading in his final years, and whose mystical experience he describes as exemplary of the ascetic denial-of-the-will:

In more developed Christianity, we see that seed of asceticism unfold into full flower in the writings of the Christian saints and mystics. Besides the purest love, these preach also complete resignation, voluntary and absolute poverty, true composure, complete indifference to all worldly things, death to one's own will and regeneration in God, entire forgetting of one's own person and absorption in the contemplation of God. A complete description of this is to be found in Fenelon's *Explication des maximes des Saints sur la vie inferieure*. But the spirit of this development of Christianity is certainly nowhere so perfectly and powerfully expressed as in the writings of the German mystics, e.g. those of Meister Eckhart, and the justly famous book *Theologia Germanica*. In the introduction to this last which Luther wrote, he says of it that, with the exception of the Bible and St. Augustine, he had learnt more from it of what God, Christ, and man are than from any other book. Yet only in the year 1851 did we acquire its genuine and unadulterated text in the Stuttgart edition of Pfeiffer. The precepts and doctrines given in it are the most perfect explanation, springing from deep inward conviction, of what I have described as the denial of the will-to-live. (WWR I, 386–87)²³

In the works of the mystics that Schopenhauer cites, the typical assumption is that mystical experience brings a person into contact with ultimate reality, where this reality is understood as a superlatively valued being. For example, the Christian quietists believed that by minimizing one's desires and sense of individuality – exactly on the lines of Schopenhauer's ascetic – an optimal receptivity would follow to allow God's spirit to fill one's consciousness. Schopenhauer spoke this way himself in his early notebooks in reference to the “better consciousness,” except with the qualification that he did not expect the reality encountered, although

²³ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

positive and amenable to being called “God,” to involve contact with a transcendent personality, as we find in traditional conceptions of God (MR I, 44).

If we consider mystical experience within the context of the Schopenhauerian metaphysics of Will for which he is well known, however, the situation complicates insofar as this standard mystical model cannot apply: For one to come into awareness of Will as the thing-in-itself and have it positively fill one’s consciousness makes no sense as a description of the ascetic’s mystical experience, for the experience arises by denying the Will, not by affirming it. If the model is to operate in the case of the ascetic, then either some other, non-Will aspect of the thing-in-itself must be entering into the ascetic’s awareness, or, if there are no non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself, then there must be some other explanation for the extraordinary peace and tranquility that the ascetic experiences.

As we have seen, Schopenhauer himself proposes that the ascetic’s mystical experience that issues from the denial-of-the-will is encountering non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself. There is no way to say what these other aspects are, but if we consider the mystics’ own characterizations of their experiences, there are references to realms of being that are *not* blind, striving, senseless, and so on, as Will is characterized, but that have a more tranquil and transcendent presentation with intimations of the divine.

If the mystics are indeed coming into contact with non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself – and here is the difficulty – then most of what Schopenhauer says about why the world is filled with egoism, selfish desire, constant frustration, and violence is left groundless, since the foundation of the world would not be senseless Will, but would involve some other kind of being, presumably positive and peaceful in nature, as some conceive of God. If non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself are admitted, Schopenhauer’s pessimism loses its metaphysical basis, as noted. He may have seen no other way to account for the ascetic’s mystical experience, but the postulation of non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself undermines his main philosophical vision of a senseless world ruled by desire and egoism, with inherently no saving grace.

An alternative way to understand the nature of the ascetic’s mystical experience is consequently required, to render the situation more consistent. There is a straightforward path available here, namely, to regard it as an activity that simply diminishes the power of the thing-in-itself as Will. Ecstasy and a feeling of liberation would not be explained by contact with a metaphysically new dimension of the thing-in-itself, but rather as the psychological effect of being globally released from the force of desire – a release that compares well to

the liberating experience of overcoming a major addiction. From the standpoint of philosophical theorizing, this way of understanding the ecstatic quality of the ascetic's mystical experience has the benefit of cohering with Schopenhauer's negative conception of happiness as merely a release from pain:

All satisfaction, or what is generally called happiness, is actually and essentially only ever *negative* and absolutely never positive. It is not something primordial that comes to us from out of itself, it must always be the satisfaction of some desire. This is because a desire, i.e. lack, is the prior condition of every pleasure. But the desire ends with satisfaction and so, consequently does the pleasure. Thus satisfaction and happiness can never be anything more than the liberation from a pain or need. (WWR I, 345)

Not only, though, can the mystic's ecstasy be accounted for on this understanding of the denial-of-the-will – one that regards it as merely a diminishing of the power of the thing-in-itself as Will; Schopenhauer's primary interest in alleviating suffering is also realized at the ultimate metaphysical level of the thing-in-itself. This becomes clear through a consideration of Schopenhauer's references to the "subterranean passage" that awareness of our inner being involves.

5 The Subterranean Passage to Universal Compassion: Schopenhauer as Buddhist

In his effort to solve "the riddle of the world," Schopenhauer is convinced that "we can never reach the essence of things *from the outside*": "no matter how much we look, we find nothing but images and names. We are like someone who walks around a castle, looking in vain for an entrance and occasionally sketching the façade. And yet this is the path that all philosophers before me have taken" (WWR I, 123). As is known, Schopenhauer accordingly explores the inner nature of objects by using his own body as the paradigm object, apprehending that the inner being of his body is best described as "Will":

Consequently, a way *from within* stands open to us to that real inner nature of things to which we cannot penetrate *from without*. It is, so to speak, a subterranean passage [*ein unterirdischer Gang*], a secret alliance, which, as if by treachery, places us all at once in the fortress that could not be taken by attack from without. Precisely as such, the *thing-in-itself* can come into consciousness. (WWR 2, 195)²⁴

²⁴ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word *will*. (WWR I, 100)²⁵

Extrapolating from that knowledge of his inner being, Schopenhauer identifies “Will” with the thing-in-itself:

We will recognize that same will as the inner essence, but not only of people and animals, which are appearances very similar to our own; rather, the continuation of this reflection will lead us to recognize this will as the driving and vegetating force in plants, the force growing in crystals, turning magnets north, delivering a shock when heterogeneous metals strike each other; it appears as repulsion and attraction, separation and unification in the elective affinities of matter, and finally, even as gravity, struggling so forcefully in all of matter, pulling stone to the earth and the earth to the sun, – all these are different only in the way they appear; in their innermost essence, they are the same thing we know so intimately and so much better than anything else, the thing that, when it occurs most clearly, we call *will*. Because we are using reflection in this manner we do not have to remain with appearances but can pass over to the *thing in itself*. . . . Only the will is *thing in itself*. . . . The will is the innermost, the kernel of every individual thing and likewise of the whole. (WWR I, 134–135)

Having established an identity between the inner being of his body and the inner being of the world as a whole, in *On the Will in Nature* (1836) Schopenhauer speculates that this connection – he once again refers to it as “subterranean” – can account for extrasensory phenomena that would otherwise have no explanation:

The dominant opinion at all times and in all countries has been that in addition to the regular way alternations are produced in the world by means of the causal nexus of bodies, there must be still another completely different way, one not at all based on the causal nexus . . . beyond the external connection between the appearances of this world, must be still another, proceeding through the essence in itself of all things, a subterranean connection, so to speak, whereby *one* point of appearance would be able immediately to affect any other by a metaphysical nexus; that therefore it must be possible to affect things from within, instead of without as is usual, an effect of appearance on appearance by means of the essence in itself that is

²⁵ Translation by E. F. J. Payne.

one and the same in all appearances . . . that the partitions of individuation and separation, no matter how firm, could still occasionally permit a communication, as it were, behind the curtains, or like a secret game under the table. (WN, 414–415)

Schopenhauer's references to the "subterranean connection" and "secret game under the table" might be valuable for revealing the nature of extra-sensory phenomena, but, more importantly, they have a direct bearing on understanding the nature of the ascetic's mystical experience. If the ascetic's denial-of-the-will is understood merely as a minimization of the energies of the Will, and if, following Schopenhauer's characterization of mystical experience, it extends beyond the individual to the thing-in-itself as Will, then that experience becomes a subterranean and *subversive* activity that touches upon and minimizes the very power of the thing-in-itself. As such, it has a morally positive value as a means to reducing suffering in the world.

The ascetic's mystical experience would not consequently be an individualistic, apparently selfish and escapist disengagement from both the spatiotemporal world and the thing-in-itself as Will. It would be one of the most moral activities possible. In terms of alleviating suffering, it would not contribute to alleviating the suffering merely of this or that individual, but would directly diminish the energy of the thing-in-itself as Will and thereby weaken the metaphysical source of all suffering.

In this respect, the ascetic's mystical experience, and Schopenhauer's philosophy in general, ultimately works toward the goal of alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings at the deepest metaphysical level. As such, it is among the most penetrating versions of Buddhist moral awareness, for the ascetic's mystical experience that follows from the extreme denial-of-the-will is none other than universal compassion put into metaphysical effect. As an expression of fundamentally Buddhist aims, Schopenhauer's uniqueness is that he realized that if one is to realize universal compassion in its most profound and effective form, one must go beyond the spatiotemporal world and focus one's attention, not upon the alleviation of suffering for this or that individual, but upon the metaphysical source of suffering itself.

Not only does this way of understanding the ascetic's mystical experience alleviate the contradiction involved in postulating non-Will aspects of the thing-in-itself, as well as cohere with Schopenhauer's negative conception of happiness; in its direct connection to the thing-in-itself as Will, it renders the ascetic's mystical experience nonescapist. The ascetic cannot be criticized for having abandoned all of the other beings that suffer in the

spatiotemporal world, for the ascetic carries out the same project of alleviating suffering at a higher, more penetrating dimension where the source of suffering is weakened at the source.

This implies a rethinking of the relationship between the moral and ascetic states in Schopenhauer's philosophy. In standard moral awareness as Schopenhauer describes it, one identifies compassionately with another suffering individual and is motivated to alleviate the individual's suffering. It can be perceived – on the present view, mistakenly – that upon denying the will extremely and having a mystical experience thereby, the ascetic moves beyond moral concerns to become selfishly immersed in otherworldly bliss, disengaged from the spatiotemporal world. It is rather, though, that the moral and ascetic stages in Schopenhauer are closely connected: The ascetic stage and the mystical experience associated with it is a positive, more effective extension of the moral stage, both of which can be conceived of as the upshots and expressions of universal compassion.

This renders Schopenhauer's ascetic into a Buddhist-style *Bodhisattva* who helps other people achieve enlightenment, not by postponing enlightenment for himself or herself, as is customarily understood, but by actively engaging in the highest level of enlightenment, which, in this case, is to express universal compassion by minimizing the suffering-producing energies of the thing-in-itself as Will. All of this follows from understanding the significance and conditions of universal guilt in Schopenhauer's philosophy, and how these conditions imply that the thing-in-itself is best conceived of as being entirely Will.

Seeing Things: Schopenhauer's Kant Critique and Direct Realism

Alistair Welchman

Introduction

In this chapter I argue, in the first section, that Schopenhauer was a direct perceptual realist. I think Schopenhauer's critique of Kant in the Appendix to the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (WWR 1) is largely bound together by his view that Kant was still welded to a precritical indirect perceptual realism, which creates the various points of tension or compromise formations that Schopenhauer enumerates. In the second section I go on to argue that this perceptual direct realism sheds light on his account of compassion, in particular making it more plausible that he is a direct realist about our perception of the emotions, or wills, of others (at least in the appropriate circumstances). This helps to resolve a problem identified in the literature, especially by David Cartwright. In the last section I address a potential objection, and show that far from being an objection, it in fact strengthens my position.

1 Direct Realism

In this section I will try to show that Schopenhauer is a direct perceptual realist. Direct perceptual realism is a response to Descartes' influential argument that the only things we can be directly aware of are our own experiences. The most hallowed example of indirect realism in analytic philosophy is the sense-data theory associated with logical positivism. On that view, we perceive sense-data, which are internal mental objects, and use them to infer the existence of the external objects to which they refer. This view has fallen into disrepute, and the emphasis in analytic philosophy of perception on (tacitly linguaform) representational content has sidestepped the question of what perception actually is or is like, although

there has recently been something of a resurgence of interest, specifically in direct realism.¹

By contrast, phenomenologists have long been focused on perceptual experience, which is resolutely direct, and many phenomenologists have been direct realists, doing justice to the strong intuition we all have that we are seeing *things* and not subjective mental representations. Husserl, for instance, clearly articulates a direct realist stance: "I do not see colour-sensations, but coloured things, I do not hear tone-sensations, but the singer's song."² And Heidegger makes the same point:

What we "first" hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling.

It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to "hear" a "pure noise". The fact that motor-cycles and waggons are what we proximally hear is the phenomenal evidence that in every case Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already dwells alongside what is ready-to-hand within-the-world; it certainly does not dwell proximally alongside "sensations" [*Empfindung*]; nor would it first have to give shape to the swirl of sensations to provide the springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a "world".³

Thus, Heidegger formulates the issue very similarly to Husserl (and indeed to Schopenhauer).

Sometimes direct realism is interpreted as involving claims about empirical objects construed as mind-independent, claims that have an ambiguous relation to the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition.⁴ Clearly, Schopenhauer is not a direct perceptual realist about ordinary objects if objects are mind-independent. So, I will stipulate that the sense of object pertinent here is that of empirical reality.

There are three elements to the theory of direct realism. The first and third are relatively straightforward. The first is that we perceive objects themselves.⁵ The third is that we don't use inference to perceive objects.

¹ Tim Crane and Craig French, "The Problem of Perception," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/perception-problem>. James Genone, "Recent Work on Naïve Realism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 53(1) (2016): 1–25.

² Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970 [1900]), 121; quoted in David Tostensen, "Husserl's Direct Perception," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 41 (1) (2010): 94–109, 97.

³ Martin Heidegger (1927) *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), 163–4; translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 207.

⁴ Crane and French, "The Problem of Perception."

⁵ Ibid. Section 3.4.1 sees naïve realist accounts of perception as claiming that perception is fundamentally a relation to ordinary objects. Genone, "Recent Work," 1, states: "[b]roadly speaking, the central

The second element is more complicated: direct realists are sensitive to the distinction between the phenomenology of perception and its implementation mechanisms or ingredients. This has been of particular concern to phenomenologists and is clear in the quotations above from Husserl and Heidegger, where they are both at pains to distinguish what we actually take to be the experience of perception from the “sensations” that are supposed to underlie it. The term “sensation” refers to an empiricist tradition that Husserl and Heidegger think misunderstands the phenomenology of perception. This tradition is broadly explanatory in nature: Sensations are part of the theoretical apparatus empiricists posit to explain perception. Phenomenologists object to this apparatus when it’s understood as part of the *phenomenology* of perception: We don’t see sensations (if such things do in fact exist); we see *things*. But it’s important to recognize that correcting this mistake is quite consistent with the existence of underlying explanatory structures.

This observation is important because it bears on the sense in which “direct” perception is indeed direct. If there are implementation mechanisms, then perception is in some sense mediated by those mechanisms. But that’s not the relevant sense in which perception *itself* may be said to be indirect. Hence my formulation, that what characterizes a direct theory of perception is sensitivity to the distinction between the phenomenology of perception and its possible implementation mechanisms or ingredients.⁶

The simplest account of this sensitivity is that perception itself is something we are aware of whereas we are not generally aware of implementation mechanisms. Thus, in the case of “sensations” the mistake of the empiricist tradition is to conflate sensations as a potential explanatory implementation theory with the phenomenology of perception by insisting that in perception we are aware of sensations. Perhaps this is too stringent: It may be possible, under nonnormative circumstances, to become consciously aware of items that are normatively unconscious aspects of the implementation of or ingredients in perception. An example is visual after-images. In these cases, however, we are not aware of objects *because* of our awareness of the implementation details.⁷

commitment of naïve realism is that mind-independent objects are essential to the fundamental analysis of perceptual experience.”

⁶ The close proximity of analytic philosophy of perception to psychology makes this a relatively uncontroversial point within that tradition. For instance, Genone, “Recent Work,” 3, treats it as obvious that naïve (or direct) realism is consistent with unconscious causal mediation in the brain.

⁷ I borrow the term “ingredient” from Richard Aquila, *Matter in Mind: A Study of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 92f. Schopenhauer uses the same word (“Ingrediens”) in a similar context (SW 3, 216).

Schopenhauer's account of perception is based on an attack on empiricism from a transcendently idealist point of view. His main concern is to establish that perception has an "intellectual basis" (SW 1, 51). By this he does not mean that perception is rational or conceptual. In fact, this is one of the main points of dispute with Kant in the Appendix to WWR 1. Perception remains resolutely intuitive, *anschaulich*: "This operation of the understanding is not one which proceeds discursively, reflectively, abstractly – by means of concepts and words – but an intuitive and completely immediate one" (SW 1, 53). But it is *constructed*.

The operators of this construction are Kantian: space and time, but most importantly, causation. Here, again, Schopenhauer deviates from Kant in classifying causation as intuitive rather than conceptual. The raw data that is worked up into perception is what Schopenhauer describes as "sensation."⁸ So, his polemic takes the form of an argument from the poverty of the stimulus to the existence of innate, that is, a priori cognitive structures – space, time and causation:

For what a poor thing is mere sensation, after all! Even in the most refined of sense organs, sensation is nothing more than a local, specific feeling, capable in its own way of some variation, however, in itself always subjective, which as such can contain absolutely nothing objective, and so nothing similar to an intuition. (SW 1, 52)

Much of the argument is empirical, but two of his arguments have a transcendental flavor: It's only possible to perceive objects as "outside" by means of the application of the a priori intuition of space – such externality is not given in the raw data of perception and can't be constructed merely from that data (SW 1, 53). This argument abandons the complex argument Kant provides in the Second Analogy, replacing it with the following elegant argument for the apriority of cause:

the understanding's procedure consists throughout in the transition from given effects to their causes, which are first presented [*darstellen*] as objects in space through just this procedure. . . . the law of causality is the first condition of all empirical intuition, but is this the form in which all experience occurs: how then could the law first be derived from experience, for which it is the essential prerequisite? (SW 1, 79)

⁸ "[T]he *understanding* is the artist forming the work, the *senses* only the assistants that present the material" (SW 1, 79); what the senses, even the objective ones (sight and touch) "produce is still by no means intuition, but the raw stuff [*rohe Stoff*] for intuition" (SW 1, 54).

Just as Kant argues that our representation of space can't be derived from experience because space is a condition of experience, that is, of representing objects as spatially external to us, so Schopenhauer argues that causality must be a priori because we represent objects as – indeed objects just *are* – the *causes* of the raw data of our sensory systems.

In some ways Schopenhauer's theory is consistent with the broad outlines of contemporary psychology. But there is a crucial difference: Schopenhauer is a transcendental idealist. So, where contemporary psychology sees the psychological processes that yield experience of objects as *recovering* the objects that actually are (in a transcendently realist sense) the causes of the initial data, Schopenhauer by contrast *identifies* the "representation [*Vorstellung*]" of the object with the object itself: "For through this operation alone, hence in the understanding and for the understanding, the objective, real, physical world presents itself" (SW 1, 53). In this transcendental sense, the world *is* representation, that is, the object doesn't preexist its construction by the transcendental apparatus of the mind. So, according to the first criterion developed above, it ought not to be controversial that Schopenhauer is a direct realist. The very first sentence of the main body of WWR 1 is "[t]he world *is* my representation" (SW 2, 3, emphasis added). Similarly, according to the third criterion, it's uncontroversial that Schopenhauer does not think perception is *inferential*. Only reason infers; and causation is part of the understanding, which does not involve concepts or inferences, but is intuitive and direct. Schopenhauer contrasts our "direct" grasp of causation with our reflective (and hence inferential) reasoning about it: Causal laws "must first of all be directly [*unmittelbar*] recognized and grasped intuitively by the understanding before it can enter abstractly into reflective consciousness" (SW 2, 25; translation modified).

However, there is some ambiguity in Schopenhauer's formulations, especially as regards the term "direct [*unmittelbar*]," which is used in a broad range of contexts. In some cases, it is a "false friend" of direct perceptual realism. For instance, the "direct" insight into causal structures just discussed supports the view that Schopenhauer doesn't think of such insight as rational or inferential. In other words, the contrast case here is not perceptual directness but conceptual mediation. So direct causal insight provides only limited support for the view that *perception* is direct: It's evidence that perception isn't inferential but is consistent with perception still being mediated – for example, by causation itself. Indeed, Schopenhauer often talks in this way, in particular in distinguishing between the body as the "immediate [*unmittelbar*] object" and objective

perception proper as mediated [*mittelbar*]. I think there is evidence that Schopenhauer understands this mediation as an implementation theory that is consistent with directness of perceptual experience itself. But it will take some argument to show this.

The best place to do so is the Appendix to WWR I, which details the ways in which Schopenhauer's theoretical philosophy differs from Kant's. The Appendix seems not to have much structure, but just to be a list of gripes about Kant. I think, however, there is an underlying principle of unity: that Kant failed completely to jettison the assumptions of precritical naïve transcendental realism. This failure is manifest in his persistent and inconsistent attempts to introduce a thought of representation *in addition both* to his account of empirical objects *and* to his account of the thing-in-itself.

So Kant actually makes a three-way distinction: (1) representation; (2) the object of representation; (3) the thing in itself. . . . But there are no grounds for distinguishing between representation and the object of representation . . . But if we do not want to consider the object of representation as a representation, thereby equating the two, then the object of representation must be assimilated to the thing in itself. . . . The source of Kant's errors is the unjustified insertion of that hybrid, the object of representation. (SW 2, 526–7)

This underlies Schopenhauer's objections to Kant's notions of thing in itself, object of knowledge and object of experience: All three notions are compromise formations, responding in various ways to what Schopenhauer sees as Kant's underlying commitment to a precritical, transcendently realist, and *indirect* theory of perception. For instance, Kant's conception of the thing-in-itself is compromised because he is still tacitly committed to the idea that it is a kind of object causing our perceptions. Kant knows this is wrong (and so diligently avoids explicitly describing it as a "cause") but Schopenhauer thinks there's no other way for Kant to think the "affection" by means of which the thing-in-itself is the source of sensory data.

Properly understood, therefore, transcendental idealism is committed to direct realism, in which there is no representational layer intervening between the perceptual subject and the object of perception = representation. This interpretation also makes sense of the critique of what Schopenhauer calls Kant's "meaningless metaphor," describing intuitions as "given" (SW 2, 509; see also SW 2, 519f., 524, 527). Here Schopenhauer elaborates a distinction between perception proper and its ingredients (and antecedents). Schopenhauer is commenting on this claim of Kant's (SW 2, 519):

Our cognition arises from two fundamental sources in the mind, the first of which is the reception of representations (the receptivity of impressions [*Eindrücke*]), the second the faculty for cognizing an object by means of these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the former an object is **given** to us, through the latter it is **thought**. (A50/B74)⁹

Schopenhauer's rejection of the metaphor of the "given" is a deep critique of Kant – for whom the distinction between a spontaneous and a receptive faculty is basic. This is Schopenhauer's critique:

the impression is nothing more than a mere *sensation* in the sense organs, and it is only by using the *understanding* (i.e. the law of causality) and space and time, the forms of intuition, that our *intellect* transforms this mere *sensation* into a *representation*, which now exists as an *object* in space and time and can be distinguished from the latter (from the object) only by appealing to the thing in itself, and is otherwise identical with it. (SW 2, 520)

Schopenhauer objects to Kant's identification of the impression with *any kind of representation*; it's not a representation, it's a mere sensation. Representations are constructed out of sensations; but sensations are not representations. It is only sensations that are "given" (SW 2, 520), a term that Schopenhauer now uses with quotation marks around it, because sensations are not (normally) *phenomenologically* given within experience; sensations are given only in the sense that they are implementation details within the psychology of perception. Kant has not liberated his thinking from precritical dogmatic transcendental realism, and so wants to try to distinguish between representations (sensations/intuitions) and objects (constructed by categories). But there is no such distinction: representations are objects; and hence "sensations" or "impressions" are not objects, but ingredients or causal antecedents of representations.

Schopenhauer hammers this point repeatedly home in his critique of Kant: "[O]ur empirical intuition is immediately [*sofort*] *objective* precisely because it emerges from the causal nexus. It has things immediately [*unmittelbar*] as its object [*Gegenstand*], and not representations distinct from things" (SW 2, 525). The two parts of this claim need to be read together: It's *because* perception is mediated at the implementation level by the application of causation (and space and time) to sensations that perception is directly of objects. The implementational constituents of intuition are *not* (normally) themselves representations precisely because

⁹ I quote from the Cambridge translation of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, giving the usual 1st/2nd edition page numbers as A/B: Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the objects of intuition are the products of implementation-level mental processes.

This analysis is also present in the main body of WWR 1, but Schopenhauer did not always use consistent terminology. He makes reference to the direct nature of perception on several occasions. In his account of causality, for instance, he concludes his view that the being of an object simply is its acting with this comment: “[A]ll that we know about an object of intuition . . . is the way it acts: there is nothing left to know about an object apart from its representation” (SW 2, 17). Similarly, alluding to the critique of Kant in the Appendix, he writes: “[D]ogmatic realism claims to separate the representation from the object (even though they are one and the same) by treating the representation as the effect of the object” (SW 2, 16).

This statement must of course be interpreted correctly and is as good an example as any of Schopenhauer's loose use of language, although also of the fact that it is usually possible to clarify the distinctions Schopenhauer is failing to make on a given occasion. Here, the statement looks plainly inconsistent with his views: Does Schopenhauer himself *not* think that representations are the effects of objects? He says they *are* in a number of places, for instance, in the passage quoted above from FR, “the understanding's procedure consists throughout in the transition from given effects to their causes,” but also in WWR 1, when he writes that insofar as an “effect is referred back to its cause, the intuition arises of this cause as an *object*” (SW 2, 13).

The difference is that dogmatic transcendental realists (and hence indirect perceptual theorists) think objects are mind-independent, and we form representations of them as the independently subsisting causes of effects on our sense organs, while transcendental idealists think of the object as first arising (transcendentally) as a result of a kind of projection outside the body, by means of the forms of space and causation, of the object as a representation. Having made this distinction, Schopenhauer feels entitled to take the empirical stance, since it seems obvious to him that empirical realism is consistent with transcendental idealism.

However, the hermeneutical problem in WWR 1 is that Schopenhauer appears to take back his account of intuitive perception as direct by contrasting the body as “immediate [*unmittelbar*] object” (SW 2, 120) with the intuitive perception of the body as an “object among objects” (SW 2, 119) occupying a position in space, which he describes as “mediate [*mittelbar*]” perception (SW 2, 22). But if perception of my body is mediated when it is

an object among objects, then it looks like Schopenhauer's account of intuitive perception in general is one in which intuitive perception is indirect. In many cases, the way in which there is mediation in contrast to the body as immediate object doesn't actually have anything to do with the phenomenology of perception. But then what does it mean to contrast regular perception with the body as "immediate object"?

To take the first point: In §5 what Schopenhauer says is that "intuition is mediated by cognition of causality" (SW 2, 15). But we already knew this: A representation of causality is a transcendental form that processes raw sensory material into a representational form, that is, into an objective representation. In §6, the contrast case of immediate cognition is different, but still doesn't affect the thesis of direct perception. There Schopenhauer says: "[W]e have immediate cognition of the thing in itself when it appears to us as our own body; but our cognition is only indirect when the thing in itself is objectified in other objects of intuition" (SW 2, 22). Here the topic of discussion is cognition of *the thing-in-itself*, not ordinary perceptual intuitions. In *this* context there is a difference between direct cognition of the thing-in-itself (i.e., in inner experience of willing) and indirect cognition of *the thing-in-itself*, the latter being mediated by representations = objects. This indirection, of course, says nothing about whether cognition of *objects* as objects is itself direct.

What then should we make of the notion of the body as immediate object? The immediate object is essentially where the lowest level of sensory registrations, sensations, or impressions, are located. We "proceed from the effects in the immediate object to a mediate object as cause, that is, to achieve the intuition of apprehension of an object" (SW 2, 27). This really would be an indirect theory of perception if we were first conscious (in an unmediated fashion) of sensations at the sensory surface of the body *and then* inferred (or otherwise figured out) what must have caused them. But Schopenhauer knows this isn't the right phenomenology of perception, and often acknowledges the misleading nature of the term "immediate object."

I claim that we have immediate cognition of the body and that it is *an immediate object*. In this context, however, the concept "object" should not be taken in anything like its proper sense, because immediate cognition is really pure sensation. As such it is prior to the application of the understanding; and so the body is not really there as an *object* at all; rather, the bodies acting upon it are what are there as objects first and foremost. Cognition of proper objects (i.e. representations intuited in space) occurs

only through and for the understanding and comes only after and not before application of the understanding. (SW 2, 23–4)¹⁰

The immediate cognition of the body is really just sensation; the body isn't an *object* at all, because objects presuppose the operation of the transcendental machinery of cognition (space, time, and cause). Schopenhauer talks *as if* there's a real chronological sense in which immediate sensory registration is "before" or "prior to" the application of cause. But this can't literally be true, since cause is precisely *a priori*. I think the best way to interpret such views is to think of Schopenhauer as grasping for but not quite having the vocabulary to express the thought that sensations are a theoretical construct, and not part of our actual perceptual experience. I cannot independently perceive the sensation that is an ingredient to an objective representation: Such sensation is "never separated from the representation developed by the understanding" (SW 3, 26).¹¹ The critique of Kant makes it clear that sensations are *not* representations, and that insight makes its way into this account too, if awkwardly.

A similar hermeneutical problem presents itself in WWR 2, chapter 2, where Schopenhauer addresses Reid and Euler, both precritical proponents of direct realism. Again, the context is that Schopenhauer is only tangentially interested in the question of direct realism, and more interested in defending his intellectual view of perception against "sensualism." Sometimes, this makes it a little hard to see what Schopenhauer is exactly saying. For instance, he writes:

The feeling that a merely sensualist explanation of intuition is inadequate is also seen in a view expressed shortly before the appearance of the Kantian philosophy, the view that we do not simply have *representations* of things that are aroused by sensations in the senses, but rather that we perceive *the things themselves* directly, although they lie outside of us; which is of course incomprehensible. And this was not intended as idealistic, it was pronounced from the typical realistic standpoint. The famous *Euler* expressed this view well and concisely in his "Letters to a German Princess", vol. 2, p. 68. "I therefore believe that sensations (of the senses) contain something more than philosophers imagine. They are not merely empty perceptions from certain impressions made in the brain: they do not give the soul mere *ideas* of things; rather, *they really present [vorstellen] the soul with objects*, objects that exist outside of it, although we cannot comprehend how this in fact works". (SW 3, 25–6)

¹⁰ See also, "[w]hat the eye, the ear, the hand senses is not an intuition: it is merely data. Only when the understanding proceeds from the effect back to the cause is the world present in intuition" (SW 2, 13–14).

¹¹ Even if in some cases we can become aware of sensations, those cases exclude their involvement in ordinary experience: I can't "see" qua sensation the blue sensation that underlies my experience of the sky and see the sky as blue. See the discussion of nonobjective senses in WWR 2, chapter 2 (SW 3, 27–8).

The crucial thing about this passage is that Schopenhauer emphasizes the importance of its *precritical* status. The problem is *not* the claim of direct realism, but rather the conjunction of direct realism with precritical transcendental realism. On the face of it, Schopenhauer thinks that it is “of course incomprehensible” that we “perceive *the things themselves* directly, although they lie outside of us” (SW 3, 25). But, on the very next page of the text, he goes on to affirm that this is literally true: We do indeed “immediately perceive *the things themselves* and in fact as located *outside us*” (SW 3, 26). What’s the difference? Transcendental idealism. If we interpret “outside us” correctly, that is, according to transcendental idealism, then we see that things can (indeed must) be perceived as empirically located in external space while that whole space is “itself inside our heads” (SW 3, 26). The expression is awkward: Space cannot of course be “inside” our heads in the same way that objects are outside. But the intent is clear.

Thus, Schopenhauer *affirms* direct realism, but denies precritical transcendental realism. We directly perceive things (empirically) external to us; and indeed, absolutely must do so, because, as he observes in this same passage, there is no distinction between object and representation: We “intuit [things] *directly*, but . . . do not have within us a representation of the things lying outside of us that is distinct from them.” Or again: “[T]he things that we intuit as located outside are only our representations and thus something perceived by us directly” (SW 3, 26).

On the face of it, Schopenhauer is a clear proponent of direct perception because his transcendental idealism commits him to the identity of empirical objects with representations. Equally clearly, he repudiates the idea that we infer the existence of empirical objects from any kind of representational data. He *does* think that intuitive perception is mediated: This is his “intellectual” theory of perception. But this mediation is merely implementational, as his critique of Kant emphasizes. Sometimes Schopenhauer talks loosely but it is always possible to disambiguate what he says.

2 Compassion

In this section I use Schopenhauer’s commitment to a direct theory of perception of ordinary empirical objects to interpret his theory of compassion.¹²

¹² This section builds on an as yet unpublished talk “Schopenhauer and Compassion,” North American Schopenhauer Society Meeting, American Philosophical Society, Central Division Meeting, Chicago, February 2016.

Schopenhauer defines compassion as follows: It is “the wholly immediate *participation* [*Theilnahme*], independent of any other consideration, first of all in another’s *suffering* [*Leiden*], and hence in the prevention or removal of this suffering” (SW 4, 208; translation modified).

In WWR I Schopenhauer interprets identification in the context of his metaphysics of the will. In Book 2, he “deduces” will as the metaphysical essence of things, or their intrinsic character. Although this argument focuses on the experience of agency to ground the will, Schopenhauer also uses the term to refer to one’s emotional life, not only to pain and pleasure, but to all the “affects and passions” (SW 2, 128). So, when I share the other’s emotional state, I share their will. But to explain identification, Schopenhauer appeals not to the claim that each entity has the same intrinsic property but rather than there is *one* will, in which we all participate, at the metaphysical level.

Identification with the other’s suffering is made possible by the compassionate individual “seeing through” the world as representation into the undifferentiated thing-in-itself where they are literally but metaphysically identical to the other. Alluding to his reading of ancient Indian texts, Schopenhauer writes that the virtuous person

shows in his way of acting [*Handlungsweise*] that he *recognizes* his own essence . . . in foreign appearances that are given to him as mere representations. . . . [He] sees through the *principium individuationis*, the veil of māyā; and to this extent he equates the essence outside of himself with his own: he does not harm it . . . [H]e *makes less of a distinction than is usually made between himself and others*. (SW 2, 439–9)

Many commentators have found this view objectionable. Some find Schopenhauer’s metaphysics extravagant.¹³ Others see the view as a kind of higher-level egoism: If I am literally identical with you, then my motive for altruism is really egoism.¹⁴ Yet others see the position as contradictory: Compassion by definition presupposes the existence of others so it can’t be grounded in an identification with the other so complete that it eliminates the distinction between persons.¹⁵

While it is possible to meet some of these objections, the extravagant nature of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in particular has motivated some

¹³ David E. Cartwright, “Compassion and Solidarity with Sufferers: The Metaphysics of *Mitleid*,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 16(2) (2008): 92–310; here 302–5.

¹⁴ This point was first made by one of Schopenhauer’s acolytes, August Becker, as well as by Max Scheler. Cartwright “Compassion and Solidarity,” 297f. has a summary and references.

¹⁵ Max Scheler (1970), *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul [1913]), 55.

commentators, most especially David Cartwright, who has written extensively on the topic, to propose a “naturalization” of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of compassion.¹⁶ Cartwright’s suggestion is to interpret the identification aspect of Schopenhauer’s theory of compassion not metaphysically but psychologically: I don’t participate “immediately” in the other’s suffering (because we are metaphysically identical), rather I participate “imaginatively” in the suffering of the other, as in some contemporary accounts of cognitive empathy or perspective-taking.¹⁷

This interpretation faces a considerable obstacle: Schopenhauer was aware of the view, from a 1772 text by Ubaldo Cassina, and explicitly rejected it. According to Schopenhauer, Cassina, argues that in compassion: “[W]e ourselves substitute ourselves in place of the sufferer and then, in our imagination, take ourselves to be suffering *his* pains in *our* person.” This is quite wrong, Schopenhauer says. We do not experience a “deception of fantasy” and “it remains clear and present to us at every single moment that he is the sufferer, not *us*: and it is precisely *in his* person, not in ours, that we feel the pain, to our distress. We suffer *with* him, thus *in* him: we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is ours” (SW 4, 211).

Cartwright rejects this objection, arguing that, on balance, the theory of imaginative identification as the basis for compassion is more plausible. His rejection does not, however, lend much weight to what Schopenhauer says about Cassina: This supposed ability to have the “experience of another’s pain in another’s body” is just “extraordinary,” something “Schopenhauer did not present any evidence for.”¹⁸

This rejection however is precipitate. Schopenhauer appears to introduce the analysis of compassion in *On the Basis of Morals* (OBM) as a way of clarifying his metaphysical account.¹⁹ Compassion becomes a central term because it is “wholly real and indeed by no means . . . rare . . . [an] everyday phenomenon,” that shows how we can be motivated to act by the suffering of the other rather than only by our own interests. Here, it is compassion that explains how I can be “*identified with*” the other, how the “*distinction* between me and the other” can be reduced even though “I am

¹⁶ Cartwright “Compassion and Solidarity,” 297. ¹⁷ Ibid., 303.

¹⁸ David Cartwright, “Schopenhauer and the Value of Compassion,” in *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Bart Vandenabeele (Oxford: Blackwell 2012), 249–65, here 260. See also Cartwright “Compassion and Solidarity,” 302–3.

¹⁹ Schopenhauer barely mentions compassion in WWR I, and it doesn’t seem to play anything like the central role there that it does in OBM. Plausibly, the fact that OBM was written anonymously led Schopenhauer to emphasize a more ordinary experience over his heavy-weight metaphysics.

not lodged *in the skin* of the other" (SW 4, 208). Schopenhauer doesn't provide an argument for his account of compassion because compassion is supposed to be an ordinary phenomenon whose appropriate description will illuminate the knotty points of his theory.

The basic insight Schopenhauer is expressing is that in compassion, at least in normative cases, we make direct cognitive contact with the other's feelings. We don't have to engage in a conscious exercise of identification in which we imagine what it must be like to be other. In other words, Schopenhauer has a *direct realist* account of emotional perception. This theory of perception acts a necessary condition for the cofeeling aspect of compassion, however that is interpreted; and the cofeeling aspect of compassion itself acts as a necessary condition for the motivational aspect of compassion. I'm not going to say much about the other aspects of Schopenhauer's position but I do want to maintain that his views about emotional perception are not at all implausible and, most importantly, it is highly likely that Schopenhauer would have had a direct realist view of emotional perception *given that he already has a direct realist view of ordinary perception*.

Direct accounts of emotional perception are not at all out of the ordinary, as Cartwright suggests; indeed, they are commonplace in the phenomenological tradition. A century after Schopenhauer's brief debate with Cassina, there was a quite similar dialectic between a psychological conception of "empathy"²⁰ as a mechanism for making contact with the other's emotions and Schopenhauer-style direct perception. Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger both pioneered direct realist accounts, in Scheler's case specifically of emotional perception, and in Heidegger's case something like other minds (modulo his idiosyncratic terminology). Scheler, for instance, argues, phenomenologically:

we certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, with his entreaty in his outstretched hands, with his love in his look of affection, with his rage in the gnashing of his teeth, with his greats in the clenching of his fist, with the tenor his thoughts in the sound of his words.²¹

Scheler argues that we don't use (conscious) inference, at least in normative cases, to establish our belief in the emotional (or mental) states of the other.²² Such considerations, represent a convergence with Schopenhauer,

²⁰ The term "empathy" is a neologism introduced to translate the German term *Einfühlung* (or "feeling into"), which was itself introduced by Theodor Lipps. See Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, xlvii–xlviii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 301–2. ²² *Ibid.*, 238–9.

for whom it is very important that virtue (and hence the compassionate perception on which it is based) is intuitive not rational: “[V]irtue is as little taught as genius: indeed, concepts are just as barren for it as they are for art.” (SW 2, 320).

More radically, but in the same vein, Heidegger’s analysis of Being-with in chapter 4 of *Being and Time* attempts to show that a person’s experience of the other, its “Being towards Others” is an “irreducible relationship,” that is, irreducible either to its “Being to itself” or to “some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand” – roughly translating out of Heideggerian as irreducible to either a first-personal or a third-personal view.²³ But it is just this reduction that is entailed by the indirect view, where I have access to first-personal data about my emotions and third-personal data about the behavioral surface of the other, and must construct the other’s emotions using some psychological process. Schopenhauer’s *Mitleid* (compassion) is of course cognate with Heidegger’s *Mitsein* (being-with).

So, Schopenhauer seems clearly to cleave to the first and the third criteria of a direct realist account of emotional perception. Perhaps even more emphatically than in his account of ordinary perception, he seems committed to rejecting the idea that emotional perception is mediated by some internal psychological procedure like that of projective empathy; similarly, as with ordinary perception, he categorically rejects any mediation by rational procedures such as analogy. What about the second criterion, that is, an appropriate sensitivity to the distinction between how perception might be implemented and the proper phenomenology of perception? This is also even clearer than in Schopenhauer’s account of ordinary perception. He simply doesn’t thematize implementation issues at all; his argument is exhaustively phenomenological, probably because compassion is supposed to be an ordinary experience whose structure yields some insight into his metaphysics.

One objection to Schopenhauer’s rebuttal of Cassina’s view is to affirm that we *do* in fact have experiences similar to those described by Cassina. Sometimes I am not sure how someone is feeling, and I might try intentionally to project myself into their situation, thereby reading off their feeling from my own. Schopenhauer doesn’t deny this. Indeed, there are a couple of occasions where he addresses such phenomena. For instance, in his discussion of justice, Schopenhauer recognizes the difficulty of grounding it in compassion: I can’t be motivated to refrain from acting unjustly by compassion because there is as yet no one suffering with whom I can have

²³ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 118, 124–5.

compassion. Schopenhauer's solution sounds like Cassina: Moral principles guide me into *imagining* the suffering I would cause, and it is compassion for this imaginary suffering that motivates me (SW 4, 216). Similarly, in a point familiar to every parent of a small child, Schopenhauer argues that weeping doesn't depend directly on first-order suffering but is mediated by reflection: We imagine we are someone else and experience compassion from that imaginary point of view for ourselves (SW 2, 444–5).

But these cases don't show that all compassion takes place in imagination; rather, they show that it's possible to have compassion even in imaginary situations. When I imagine how someone will feel if I wrong them, it is the situation that's imaginary. If we demodalize it and consider it as real, there's no reason to think imagination is required to see the pain in the face of the other.

The second objection is Scheler's. Despite the Cassina analysis, Schopenhauer nowhere repudiates his claim that the virtuous person "sees through the *principium individuationis*, the veil of *māyā*" (SW 2, 439). "That are thou," Schopenhauer repeats several times in the course of WWR I (e.g., SW 2, 259–60). But, Scheler points out, this metaphysical identification obliterates the distinctness of persons presupposed by compassion.²⁴ There are a number of possible responses to this.

First, it's worth noting that the virtuous person makes "*less of a distinction than is usually made between himself and others*" (SW 2, 440) rather than no distinction at all. So, there is *some* room to maintain the distinctness of persons. Schopenhauer sees virtue and compassion as continuous with an ascetic denial that really does make no distinction between oneself and others. But Sandra Shapshay and Tristran Ferrell have argued that the two views are not continuous but inconsistent.²⁵ If this is correct, then an analysis of the structure of compassion is no longer hostage to continuity with the strong metaphysical identity thesis underlying Schopenhauer's account of asceticism.

Second, Colin Marshall proposes an interesting solution to the problem of the second person in Schopenhauer's account of compassion. In compassion, he argues, we see through *representational*, that is, spatiotemporal individuation, but not through *all* individuation. Instead, we grasp the intelligible (Platonic) Idea of the other.²⁶ This supports the Shapshay/

²⁴ Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 55.

²⁵ Sandra Shapshay and Tristran Ferrell, "Compassion or Renunciation? That Is the Question of Schopenhauer's Ethics," *Enrahonar. Quaderns de Filosofia* 55 (2015): 51–69. See also Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer's Ethics: Hope, Compassion and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 25–33.

²⁶ Colin Marshall, "Schopenhauer on the Content of Compassion," *Nous* (2020): 1–18. Marshall develops a point from G. E. Varner, "The Schopenhauer Challenge in Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics* 7 (1985): 209–29.

Ferrell reading. Now there are three quite distinct levels: spatiotemporal individuation (ordinary life); nonspatiotemporal individuation (compassion); and nonindividuation (asceticism).

But my aim in this analysis has been to propose a reinterpretation of the metaphysical identity theory in WWR I on the basis of the phenomenological account in OBM. It's possible to remain within the purview of Cartwright's original intent to "naturalize" Schopenhauer but without endorsing a Cassina-like theory of imaginative identification to substitute for Schopenhauer's official theory of metaphysical identification. A notable feature of my analysis of compassion as (based on) a direct theory of emotional perception is that any use of the term "identification" has dropped out of consideration. This is a feature not a bug: Identification is a difficult term, and neither psychological nor metaphysical versions are convincing. My suggestion is that identification should be interpreted in terms of emotional perception rather than the other way around. It's not that we see "through" the veil; but that the ordinary experience of compassion shows how we do in fact build collective structures, through emotions taking the (directly perceived) emotions of others as their object. In this way, we can "identify with" the other, without becoming one with them either in our imaginations or in metaphysical reality.

3 Meaning

In the last section, I address a *prima facie* reasonable objection, and show that in fact it strengthens my argument. This objection is that there is a clear dissimilarity between the kind of direct realism Schopenhauer entertains in the perceptual realm, and the kind involved in compassion. As a result of these dissimilarities, even if Schopenhauer is committed to a direct realist theory of ordinary perception, this isn't evidence that he's committed to a direct theory of *emotional* perception.

Schopenhauer's perceptual direct realism is driven by the equation of object and representation. This is quite different from the standard case of direct realism, which is usually understood in a precritical transcendental realist context as the claim that although there may very well *be* mental entities that play a role in perception, these are not ultimately what we perceive: We perceive (mind-independent) objects. In the case of compassion, external behavior is already a perceptual given, and the question is whether one can "see through" that behavior to the emotional states (states of the will) that lie behind it. In fact, the "seeing through" metaphor works for the standard case too: We "see through" representations *to* objects.

The transparency metaphor is obviously at issue for Schopenhauer in questions of (direct) cognition of the thing-in-itself; but there's no analogue of it in the direct object perception case, for Schopenhauer simply equates representation with object rather than distinguishing them but treating the representation as transparent. Thus, the cases are different, and his perceptual direct realism does not provide support for a direct realist account of compassion or for any other mode of cognition of the thing-in-itself. Indeed, in many ways the precritical (Cartesian) question of our mode of cognitive access to objects independent of our representations is displaced in Schopenhauer onto the question of access to the will. So, it would be quite wrong to use the equation of object with representation (that partly drives Schopenhauer's direct perceptual realism) to legitimate a move *beyond* representation.

I don't think this objection is overwhelming because Schopenhauer's naturalism in fact *does* give him a category of (sub)representational processes that make possible perceptual contact with objects but aren't themselves normally perceptual objects. This is the point of the second property of direct realism: sensitivity to the difference between perception and its ingredients or precursor processes.

But, in fact, it turns out that the apparent asymmetry between ordinary and emotional perception in fact *strengthens* my position. The reason is twofold. First of all, there is another object of perception that is structured like compassion and which Schopenhauer argues we nevertheless perceive directly. That object is linguistic meaning. But, second, the dominant way in which Schopenhauer understands his metaphysics of the will is precisely *in terms of* meaning. This is most explicitly brought out in of WWR 2, where he canvasses a "hermeneutic" interpretation of his metaphysics that many commentators have found more congenial than his earlier allegedly transcendent metaphysics.²⁷ I do not think this interpretation is correct: The transparency of linguistic meaning reinforces Schopenhauer's commitment to the phenomenology of direct perception in various domains; and his hermeneutical understanding of metaphysics suggests that we do in fact have direct perceptual access to the representation-transcendent will precisely *as* the meaning of representation in general (even if this access is not ordinary but given only in special cases, like compassionate moral perception).

²⁷ Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2005), chapter 4, for example.

Schopenhauer's direct realist reading of the phenomenology of our perception of linguistic meaning is relatively famous because it may have influenced Wittgenstein's similar account.²⁸

As an object of outer experience, speech is clearly nothing other than a highly perfected telegraph that communicates arbitrary signs with the greatest speed and the finest nuance. But what do the signs mean [*bedeuten*]? How does their interpretation [*Auslegung*] occur? While others speak, do we somehow instantaneously translate their speech into imaginative pictures that fly past us at lightning speed and move around and link themselves together, forming and colouring themselves according to the ever increasing stream of words and grammatical forms? What a tumult there would be in our heads while listening to a speech or reading a book! It does not happen like this at all. The meaning [*Sinn*] of speech is immediately understood, grasped exactly and determinately without, as a rule, being mixed up with any imaginative pictures [*Phantasmen*]. (SW 2, 47)

Here Schopenhauer is making both a negative and a positive point. The negative point is a phenomenological rebuttal of empiricist theories of abstraction, in which concepts (and hence concept-terms) are supposed to be represented by one of their instances. The positive point is that (however we *do* in fact achieve an understanding of concept meaning) the phenomenology of the experience of understanding linguistic symbols for concepts is not mediated by any visual images.²⁹

If the arguments in section I are sound, and this mediation is consistent with perceptual directness in the case of ordinary objects, then we also have direct perception of linguistic meaning. But linguistic meaning is more similar to compassionate perception than it is to ordinary perception. We don't ordinarily have perceptual access to sensations, construed as the ingredients in or antecedents of object perception. But in the cases of perception both of linguistic meaning and the emotions of the other, we have ordinary (direct) perceptual access to people's emotional behavior or faces in the same way we have ordinary (direct) perceptual access to the visual or sonic shapes of words. Direct perception of meaning and emotion involves the transparency of these ordinary perceptions: We see through them into meanings of words and the emotions of the other, respectively. If

²⁸ Severin Schroeder, "Schopenhauer's Influence on Wittgenstein," in Vandenabeele, *Companion to Schopenhauer*, 367–84, 379.

²⁹ Schopenhauer makes similar comments in WWR 2 (SW 3, 27) where he describes the direct perception of conceptual meaning through words as "an analogous process" to that of the direct perception of objects: In both cases there is a process of causal mediation, but we have no "consciousness" of it (although he describes the process in rather Kantian "as if" terms).

meaning perception is analogous to ordinary perception, as Schopenhauer says, then emotional perception is too, other things being equal, and at least in the appropriately enlightened circumstances.

But the bearing of Schopenhauer's direct perception account of meaning on the view that we can have intuitive access to the thing-in-itself goes beyond the plausibility of attributing the same view across different domains. In fact, Schopenhauer uses the word–meaning relation in a quadrilateral of proportion *as a specific way of describing the relation between appearances and the will*: The metaphysical, that is, the thing-in-itself, is “what is merely clothed in appearance and wrapped in its form; it is to appearance what a thought is to the words” (SW 3, 204).

This is a kind of analogy, but it is being used in a different way, and is stronger than analogies usually are. Schopenhauer's use of this figure is not intended to establish anything about the relata, as the argument from analogy tries to establish something about other minds. Such arguments depend upon similarities and can establish only similarities. Instead, Schopenhauer is using this figure to establish the *identity* of the relations between the two pairs of terms. But if the thought (meaning)/word relation is the same as the will/appearance relation, and the former is characterized by direct perception, then so is the latter.³⁰

This is not a mere one-off comparison in the text. Although German uses two terms for “meaning,” either “*Sinn*” or “*Bedeutung*,” it is unambiguous in this passage that Schopenhauer is intent on emphasizing that the two relations (between thing-in-itself and appearance on the one hand, and between meaning and word on the other) are the same because he uses the same term, “*Sinn*,” when describing the thing-in-itself as he does in the WWR 1 passage about speech: “[P]hilosophy is nothing other than the accurate, universal understanding of experience itself, the true interpretation of its sense and content [*Sinnes und Gehaltes*]” (SW 3, 204).

What is particularly interesting is that this whole passage (SW 3, 202f.) is the very passage that commentators point to as suggesting a revision in Schopenhauer's conception of metaphysics or philosophy (as the passage just quoted says) from transcendent to immanent. Doubtless Schopenhauer does modify his view in some respects, for instance, in distinguishing the thing-in-itself in itself from the thing-in-itself for us. But the idea popular in the literature that Schopenhauer goes from

³⁰ This is how Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 328 [Ak. 5: 464] understands such “qualitative” forms of analogy.

transcendent metaphysician to modest mere “interpreter” of experience cannot be sustained, because the hermeneutic view is perfectly consistent with, indeed partly *explains*, the transcendent metaphysical view. We can, albeit only under special, extreme, or unusual circumstances, *see* the will as the meaning of the world, as we see the meaning of these words on the page.

And when we consider the wider semantic field of “*Bedeutung*” it becomes clear that Schopenhauer himself understood even his early transcendent metaphysics in terms of a semantic relationship. This wider field isn’t stretching the point, however, and for two reasons. First, in general the semantic fields of “*Bedeutung*” and “*Sinn*” both include clearly semantic relations (like the English terms “significance” and “sense”). Second, in the quotation we started with, about hearing speech, Schopenhauer starts with a more general but still clearly semantic question that uses “*bedeuten*”: “But what do the signs mean [*bedeuten*]?” before moving on to specify “speech,” in which context he uses “*Sinn*” (SW 2, 47).

When both of these terms are included, however, it then becomes clear that Schopenhauer conceived of the thing-in-itself, the will, as the meaning or significance of appearances at a very basic level, and from the publication of WWR 1. To take just one, highly important, example, when Schopenhauer first introduces the very possibility of the thing-in-itself:

In the First Book we considered representation only as such, which is to say only with respect to its general form. Of course when it comes to abstract representations (concepts), we are familiar with their content as well, since they acquire this content and meaning [*Bedeutung*] only through their connection to intuitive representation and would be worthless and empty without it. This is why we will have to focus exclusively on intuitive representation in order to learn anything about its content, its more precise determinations, or the configurations it presents to us. We will be particularly interested in discovering the true meaning of intuitive representation; we have only ever *felt* this meaning before, but this has ensured that the images do not pass by us strange and meaningless [*nichtssagend*] as they would otherwise necessarily have done; rather, they speak and are immediately understood and have an interest that engages our entire being. (SW 2, 113)

Again, Schopenhauer makes a direct comparison between the “meaning” (*Bedeutung*) of concepts and the meaning of intuitions themselves. There is something paradoxical about this. Here, Schopenhauer does not start off from a phenomenological account of meaning *perception* but from his theory of the constitution of conceptual (and hence linguistic) meaning

itself. That theory is extensional or referential (in today's terminology): The meaning of a concept is simply the extension of the set of intuitive representations it refers to. So, the "meaning" of intuitive representations as a whole can't literally *be* the same as the meaning of concepts: It's the relation that is identical not the relata. But the extensional nature of conceptual meaning suggests something about what it is like. Just as it is in intuition that we make cognitive contact with the representations that comprise the meaning of a concept, so there must be privileged or "peak" epistemic experiences in which we make cognitive contact with the meaning of intuition: in first-person experience of agency, in compassionate contact with the will of the other, in aesthetic contemplation of immediate objectivation of the will, and perhaps in the cognitive component of asceticism.

This passage quoted above is a crucial one for the development of the text, but Schopenhauer's works as a whole are suffused with a semantic vocabulary used to describe contact with the will. Sandra Shapshay, for instance, puts a lot of weight on Schopenhauer's poetic claim that Christianity's disregard for animals "fails to recognize the eternal essence that is present in everything that has life, and that shines out with unfathomable significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] from all eyes that see the light of the sun" (SW 4, 162).³¹ But what is this significance? It is surely the will – it is not as mere or purely cognitive creatures that we should respect (nonhuman) animals; it is because this cognition is linked to sentience, to a capacity for *feeling* or the will.

And none of these are isolated examples. In the Appendix, Schopenhauer takes up again the comparison between concepts and intuitions, describing "concepts . . . deprived of their foundation in intuition," as "empty and unreal" while "[o]n the other hand, intuitions have immediate and considerable meaning in themselves (the will, the thing in itself, is even objectified in them): they are their own representatives, speak for themselves, and their content is not simply borrowed, as is the case with concepts" (SW 2, 562–3). Concepts get their meaning from intuitions; but intuitions' meaning is, as it were, immanent to them, directly perceptible in and through them, as in Schopenhauer's description of our perception of linguistic meaning.

And in a more general way, we understand the "inner meaning" of causation when we think of it as will (SW 2, 150);³² similarly, will must be

³¹ Sandra Shapshay, "Was Schopenhauer a Kantian Ethicist?," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 28(2) (2020): 168–87, here 178.

³² That is, we understand it, *seiner inneren Bedeutung nach*.

presupposed “if causal explanation is to have sense or meaning [*Sinn . . . Bedeutung*]” (SW 2, 166). The Ideas themselves are distinguished in a hierarchy where the lower levels “do not have any profound meaning or interpretive richness [*Bedeutsamkeit und vielsagendem Inhalt*],” (SW 2, 251) while (presumably) the higher levels do (“*Bedeutsamkeit*” is the same, relatively unusual word, that Shapshay draws relevant attention to). It seems plausible even to say that Schopenhauer’s *primary* way of thinking of the will is in terms of meaning.

Now is not the time to try to make this claim good. In this section I’ve wanted to show that an obvious objection to my argument in fact strengthens it. That objection is that the peculiar nature of Schopenhauer’s (avowed) direct realist theory of ordinary perception precludes its generalization to, for example, compassion. The former account of direct perception in the ordinary case is the result of Schopenhauer’s identification of representation with object; but in the compassion case we are already directly aware of the person as (mere) representation, and the direct theory argues that we see “through” this surface to their wills. It’s a reasonable objection. But there’s evidence against it because Schopenhauer’s theory of meaning perception is also direct, and it’s more similar to the compassion than the ordinary perception case. But perhaps more importantly, I have sketched an interpretation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics that shows that meaning is in fact the central way in which he understands the will: It is what lends representation significance. So, his account of meaning is of singular importance for understanding how we make perceptual contact with the will. In addition to its independent interest, this also shows that there’s less of a break between the “transcendent” early Schopenhauer and the “hermeneutic” late Schopenhauer.

Conclusion

I have tried to establish that Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant is based on an attempt to purge Kant’s transcendental idealism of what Schopenhauer views as the residues of a tacit commitment to precritical indirect perceptual realism. As a concomitant, Schopenhauer himself sees transcendental idealism as a form of direct perceptual realism. This form can’t be the same as the precritical forms of direct realism (of, e.g., Euler and Reid) that Schopenhauer also criticizes in WWR 2, because the objects we are (directly) aware of in ordinary perception are transcendently ideal.³³

³³ For the same reason, Schopenhauer’s view is distinct from some of the contemporary forms of direct realism.

Nevertheless, they are *empirically* real. I've further argued that this sheds light on Schopenhauer's account of compassion. Compassion presupposes some kind of access to the emotions (wills) of the other. Schopenhauer's reliance on identification forces him into a dilemma: Metaphysical identification through the unity of the will obliterates the distinction between persons (as Scheler points out); but psychological identification, as Schopenhauer himself points out, is a fantasy of connection with the other. A direct perception account resolves this dilemma and is the more plausible because Schopenhauer is a direct realist in ordinary perception. I concluded by addressing an objection. This objection reveals a relatively under-researched aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy: his persistent understanding of the will as the *meaning* of representation.

The Sciences in The World as Will and Representation

Marco Segala

I The Current View on the Sciences in *The World as Will and Representation*

“Will” and “representation,” the two central concepts of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, indicate the main tasks of *The World as Will and Representation*: to illuminate the path toward *salvation* (from the will) and to obtain *knowledge* of the world (through representation). Throughout his whole life, Schopenhauer was concerned with *salvation* as the prospect of a life without suffering – or at least with less suffering – and Books 3 and 4 of WWR I remind us that we can overcome the tyranny of the will.¹ *Knowledge* is the solid ground on which humanity stands in order to confront the will and face up to its objectifications. Whether knowledge of the will, the Ideas, or another as a being like me; whether representational (intuitive) or scientific (rational), every page of WWR I mentions knowledge as the ultimate source of any activity shaping our own life – including salvation or the aspiration for a decent life.

Strangely enough, notwithstanding the substantive role of knowledge in dealing with the world as will, scholars have shown little interest in the function of the learning derived from the experimental and natural sciences² in Schopenhauer’s system.³ It seems that they have been convinced by some statements in WWR I, where Schopenhauer characterizes the natural sciences as providing a knowledge devoid of metaphysical

¹ The best presentation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy as soteriology is provided by N. De Cian, *Redenzione, colpa, salvezza. All’origine della filosofia di Schopenhauer* (Trento: Verifiche, 2002).

² Around 1800 the terms used in Germany were *Physik* or *Naturkunde*.

³ A caveat is necessary here: In the century following Schopenhauer’s death quite a few scientists were attracted by his writings about the sciences, often for celebratory reasons (among them, Ludwig Boltzmann, Florian Cajori, Helmut Hasse, Otto Juliusburger, Ferruccio Zambonini, Alwin Mittasch). Their contributions can still be of interest to assess the quality and quantity of Schopenhauer’s mastery of the sciences at his time, but they were lacking the philosophical spirit of inquiry we look for today in contributions to the history of philosophy.

interest and one that must be enlightened by metaphysics. To wit, he writes that the sciences consist

in nothing other than the forms of all appearance . . . But . . . all this does nothing more than tell us why any given determinate appearance needs to manifest itself now here and now there. It will never help us penetrate the inner essence of things; something is always left over that no explanation will dare to give, but rather must always presuppose, namely the forces of nature . . . [The principle of sufficient reason], to be sure, determines only the coming forward itself, not *what* comes forward, only the How, not the What of what appears, simply the form, not the content. (WWR I, 146–7)

The main point is that even if we recognize and understand the regularity of phenomena through the laws of nature, we do not have – and cannot have – a scientific explanation for the forces of nature behind them. A law

does not shed any light at all on the inner essence of any of these appearances: this inner essence is called a natural force, and lies outside of the ambit of aetiological explanation; what aetiology calls a natural law is the unchanging constancy with which such a force expresses itself, whenever its known conditions are present. . . . Consequently, even the best aetiological explanation of the whole of nature would really be nothing more than a catalogue of inexplicable forces. (WWR I, 121–2)

Thus, the sciences do not provide the answers only philosophy can offer:

every natural scientific explanation must ultimately end up in an occult quality, and hence in something completely obscure: . . . this is the point where philosophy really takes things up again and considers them from its own point of view, which is quite distinct from that of the sciences. . . . The very thing that the sciences presuppose and posit as the basis and limit of their explanations is exactly what constitutes the real problem for philosophy: so the latter starts just where the sciences stop. . . . The present philosophy at least is not remotely concerned with *where the world* came from or *what it is for*, but only with *what* it is. (WWR I, 106–8)

In WWR I, the main function of the sciences, as summarized by John Atwell, is to display an enigma, the solution to which requires an investigation into a dimension of reality not subject to the principle of sufficient reason. The field of the natural sciences is “incomplete and therefore in need of metaphysical elucidation.”⁴

⁴ John Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 60. He also adds (*ibid.*, 66) “It may then be said with reasonable certainty that Schopenhauer broaches the subject of metaphysical inquiry, and specifically, the issue of what the world is besides representation, by finding natural science inadequate to clarify natural

The recognition of this merely ancillary role of the sciences in relation to metaphysics has become part of the standard interpretation of *The World as Will and Representation*.⁵ It has been mitigated sometimes by the concession that “Schopenhauer’s philosophy of science offers a valuable perspective on empirical observation and theory”⁶ and requires that “philosophers need to know a good deal of science.”⁷ Rudolf Malter has even admitted that the natural sciences may have a role in Schopenhauer’s reformulation of the question about the “what” after the Absolute-idealistic turn of the post-Kantians and their ontological rejection of the thing-in-itself.⁸ But the presence and role of the sciences in *The World as Will and Representation* has remained poorly interpreted⁹ – even though the work discusses a large amount of scientific literature in depth, takes positions on theories and methodologies, and raises important questions about the nature of the scientific enterprise. Considering that Schopenhauer had an agenda, namely, the exposition of a complete system devoted to fight the tyranny of the will, and clearly stated that everything in his system had a specified function to accomplish this task,¹⁰ we should resist the traditional scholarly devaluation of the sciences in this work.

In this chapter, I shall cast light on the role of the sciences in the elaboration of Schopenhauer’s system. I shall argue that: (a) the metaphysics of Book 2 in *The World as Will and Representation* depends on the

forces So the task of clarifying them is left to metaphysics.” Beiser recalls the primacy of metaphysics over the sciences while explaining Schopenhauer’s legacy and success in the second half of the nineteenth century; against neo-Kantians and positivists who revered the rising reputation and success of the natural sciences, *The World as Will and Representation* offered new and compelling reasons to reinstate philosophy – metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics – as the ultimate source of knowledge: Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.

⁵ See Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 32–4. Christopher Janaway “Will and Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. C. Janaway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144: “scientific explanation of phenomena is essentially incomplete and requires a metaphysical foundation in an account of the inner nature underlying the world of phenomena.”

⁶ Dale Jacquette, *Schopenhauer* (Chesham, UK: Acumen, 2005), 64.

⁷ Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005), 55.

⁸ Rudolf Malter, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Transzendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik des Willens* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991), 163–70.

⁹ D. W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge, 1980), 76: “little enough emerges from the main work concerning science. Once again it seems that Schopenhauer had little interest in the practice of science as such or in the details of its methods.” Jacquette, *Schopenhauer*, 64: “The limitations of this caricature of natural science are transparent. Anyone familiar with the way scientific research is actually conducted will appreciate the crudeness of Schopenhauer’s description.”

¹⁰ This is expressed by both the notion of “single thought” (WWR I, vii–viii) and the famous metaphor of “Thebes with a hundred gates”: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*, trans. and ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

relationship with the sciences; (b) the difficulties of harmonization between science and philosophy in the first edition prompted a revision of this relationship; which (c) encouraged an alternative view of metaphysics in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*.

Ultimately, I seek to show that there is a compelling, alternative reading of the function of the sciences in WWR I. In order to do so, I shall start by focusing on the threefold metaphysical project developed in the work, taking close account of what differentiates metaphysics of nature from aesthetics and ethics.

2 A Threefold Metaphysics

Schopenhauer's view of the status of science and its relationship to philosophy in WWR I can be summarized as follows: (a) we wonder about the world and we find ourselves looking for explanations either through the sciences or philosophy; (b) even if they offer two different kinds of answers, they share a common form – abstraction and conceptualization; (c) scientific discoveries fuel philosophical investigation in the form of concepts that are translated into nonempirical questions (such as “What is the force of elasticity?” or “What makes one species different from another?”); and (d) philosophy “starts just where the sciences stop” (WWR I, 108) and confronts the problems left unsolved by the sciences.

As sketched above, commentators have understood Schopenhauer's treatment of this relationship as dismissive of science with respect to philosophy: Either inferior or merely ancillary, science seems not to be of great import within the system of knowledge established by *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer's exposition of the metaphysics of nature in Book 2 – with its scattered references to the natural sciences – is read as adopting scientific content in a purely instrumental way. From the point of view of Schopenhauer's *esprit de système* this is not surprising: Books 3 and 4 can also be read in this way – works of art and moral behaviors raise questions about the “what” of aesthetics and morality but cannot supply the answers; only metaphysics can do that. The systematic construction of WWR I provides the explanation of natural, artistic, and ethical phenomena via a threefold metaphysics (of nature, arts, and morals) involving nonphenomenal entities. For instance, aesthetic experience is explained by the contemplation of Ideas; morality is related to fighting the will-to-life and acknowledging the moral value of the

other;¹¹ and understanding nature requires recourse to a metaphysical process called “objectivation of the will.”

Such a neat symmetry in the three metaphysical books of WWR I is, however, only apparent. It is not precisely the *phenomenal content* of aesthetic and moral experience that points to the metaphysical content; it is rather an insight into metaphysical content through such experiences more or less directly that takes place in these domains. A person contemplates beauty by will-less contemplation of an Idea and acts morally through intuitive insight into one’s continuity with the other. In the cases of aesthetics and ethics, Schopenhauer is inclined to concede that there is an immediate intuition (*Anschauung*) – even if the ordinary person would never understand the perception as such – that enables one to perceive the metaphysical basis of the aesthetic or compassionate experience, respectively, the Ideas or the moral value of the other.

This is not the case in respect of the relationship between the metaphysics of nature and phenomenal reality. There is no intuition of the metaphysical bases of phenomena through external observation. We need the sciences – which start from appearance and end with the mystery of the natural forces – to confront the metaphysical question about the “what” behind phenomena (WWR I, 136). The sciences distance themselves from phenomena, and scientific abstract entities help define the questions pertinent to metaphysics. When science claims that gravitational phenomena are explained by the force of gravity, metaphysics must make intelligible the ultimate nature of that force – by accepting science as the proper basis of its own investigation. In other words, the metaphysics of nature sheds light precisely on the set of generalizations described by scientific findings.

Thus, we can see what distinguishes metaphysics of nature from aesthetics and ethics: Metaphysics of nature is a metaphysics of scientific *concepts*, rather than of natural phenomena – “philosophy however only thinks about universals, even in nature: here, the original forces themselves are its object” (WWR I, 166). Whereas science is removed from intuitive knowledge, unlike aesthetics and ethics its concepts are as philosophically

¹¹ In *On the Basis of Morals* §19, Schopenhauer defends the view that our kinship with the other is the source of compassion and provides the grounding of ethics. Sandra Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics: Hope, Compassion, and Animal Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 4 elaborates Schopenhauer’s argument and convincingly shows that in ethics there are intermediary stages of explanation of moral behavior, besides the will as ultimate, monistic metaphysical foundation. Compassion for another like me is one intermediary foundation. Another comes from the doctrine of Ideas, which corresponds to the intelligible character of each human individual.

relevant as works of art or ethical behaviour. The sciences are far from being ancillary, and this is even more clearly stated in *On Will in Nature* (1836). This is not only because Schopenhauer praises his philosophy for being in dialogue with the sciences – “my metaphysics proves itself to be the only one that actually has a common point of contact with the physical sciences, a point at which they meet it by their own means, so that they actually connect and agree with it” (WN, 323). It is also because it explains why “unprejudiced scientists who follow the path of their particular science” (WN, 305) and reach the limits of their investigation are able to recognize that beyond those limits “is *inclinations and desires*, i.e., will” (WN, 352). Here, Schopenhauer is adding something new and relevant to his previous conception of the scientific enterprise: Scientists themselves may have a vision about the metaphysical entity behind the natural forces or species – an intuition applied to scientific generalizations, rather than directly to phenomena as in the case of aesthetics and ethics.¹²

Thus, while science was not philosophically unimportant or subordinate for Schopenhauer – no less than art or ethical behavior – within the system it was more problematic than these other domains of inquiry, and Book 2 of *The World as Will and Representation* suffered from these difficulties – a fact reflected in the structure of the printed work. Book 2 is the shortest of the four books – which is rather surprising given its systemic importance; even the Appendix is longer. Furthermore, some of its central tenets – like the Ideas or the progressive sequence of levels of objectifications (*Stufenfolge*) – are fraught with unclarity. I turn now to an examination of such difficulties in order to elucidate their causes.

3 Philosophy of Nature

The second book of *The World as Will and Representation* opens with metaphysical questions about “the true meaning of intuitive representation” (WWR I, 119) and the “essence of things” (WWR I, 123). The answer comes from the “double cognition we have of our own body” (WWR I, 123) as “representation like any other” object (WWR I, 124) and as something more profound and essential, “designated by the word will”

¹² The text is not very clear about the nature of such a vision. Here is another passage: Scientists “succeed at casting a stolen glance beyond the curtain that . . . fixes the limits of their science, . . . in a way perceiving its constitution, and in a way even peering into the realm of metaphysics that lies on the other side of the curtain” (WN, 326; my emphasis). Another example is at the beginning of the chapter on Physical Astronomy, which quotes John Herschel’s speculation about the ultimate, metaphysical explanation of gravity (WN, 389).

(WWR I, 124). We always feel our body in both ways: Any action of the body perceived as a representation is immediately acknowledged as “nothing but an objectified act of will . . . That is why I will now call the body the *objecthood of the will*” (WWR I, 125). Used “as a key to the essence of every appearance in nature” (WWR I, 129), this “*philosophical truth par excellence*” (WWR I, 127) is extended by analogy to any other body to conclude that the natural world “in itself and according to its innermost essence . . . is what we find immediately in ourselves as will” (WWR I, 130).

As promised, Schopenhauer has given the metaphysical answer to the question of “what” the world is, namely, it is will as the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*). It “has nothing to do with even the most general form of all representation, that of being an object for a subject, and it has even less to do with the subordinate forms that are collectively expressed in the principle of sufficient reason. . . . It lies outside of time and space, outside the *principium individuationis*.” (WWR I, 137–8). Instead, we live in a world characterized by “multiplicity (conditioned by coexistence and succession), *change and persistence* (conditioned by the law of causality), and matter (the representation of which presupposes causality), and finally everything that can only be represented by means of these” (WWR I, 145).

The metaphysics of nature offers a closer examination of the will as metaphysical entity and has the task of explaining the actual process that produces the natural world from the will in itself. According to Schopenhauer, it is a process of objectivation (*Objektivierung*) whereby the will becomes object of cognition under the forms of space, time, and causality. Every single object or phenomenon is “appearance of the will, the will becoming visible, the *objecthood of the will* [*Objektivität des Willens*]” (WWR I, 133) and the will “itself is present whole and undivided in every single thing in nature, in all of life” (WWR I, 154).¹³

Schopenhauer provides a meticulous analysis of *Objektivierung* by distinguishing two steps of objectivation: the one we experience as representation in our daily life; and an antecedent one – ontologically rather than temporally primary – which produces objects outside space and time that are ordered by “different levels of objectivation of the will that exist as the

¹³ “Only the will is thing in itself: as such, the will is by no means a representation, it is quite different in kind from representation: all representations, all objects are the appearance, the visible manifestation, the objecthood of the will” (WWR I, 135). These pages of §§ 20 and 21 insist in repeating these fundamental concepts: They want to remind the reader that Schopenhauer remains faithful to the core of Kant’s philosophy, whose “greatest merit is to distinguish between appearance and thing in itself” (WWR I, 444). Repetitions and insistence are typical in Schopenhauer’s writing, but in Book 2 of WWR I they sometimes indicate weaknesses in the arguments. We will highlight other repetitions of this kind in other sections of Book 2.

unattained models of the countless individuals in which they are expressed.” These unattained models are Plato’s Ideas: “the eternal forms of things, . . . the medium of individuals, . . . not subject to any change, always being and never becoming, while the individuals arise and pass away, always becoming and never being” (WWR I, 154).

He highlights the ontological priority of the Ideas. The world as representation is a world of appearances, not of things. Real things are the Ideas: “only Ideas, not individuals, have genuine reality [*Realität*]” (WWR I, 303). Notwithstanding their major epistemic function in aesthetics, it is in the context of the metaphysics of nature that Ideas exhibit their ontological primacy. Moreover, they are epistemically very important here, providing the philosophical explication of the world as described by the scientific concepts of forces and species. They represent “every determinate and fixed level of the will’s objectification, to the extent that it is a thing in itself and thus foreign to all multiplicity; indeed, these levels relate to individual things as their eternal forms or archetypes” (WWR I, 155); they step in “where aetiological explanation ends and metaphysical explanation begins” (WWR I, 165).¹⁴

Both will and the Ideas have sparked various scholarly interpretations. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, these were subjects of inquiry (and disagreement) and this has continued to the present day.¹⁵ Notwithstanding such great interest, will and the Ideas are mainly discussed with respect to their ontological and epistemological aspects rather than in relationship to the metaphysics of nature and the sciences.¹⁶ It is my contention that looking at these topics through this lens offers a new and revealing perspective on Schopenhauer’s thought as a whole.

¹⁴ At the beginning of Book 2 (WWR I, 120–1), Schopenhauer distinguishes between morphology (including the descriptive and classificatory sciences of natural history such as botany and zoology) and aetiology (which includes the explanatory sciences of natural philosophy such as physics, chemistry, and physiology).

¹⁵ As an example of older criticism, see Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche: ein Vortragszyklus* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1907), chapters 3 and 5. More recently, see Nicoletta De Cian and Marco Segala, “What Is Will?,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 83 (2002): 13–42, and its discussion of a series of studies of the late twentieth century; the contributions by Dale Jacquette, Christopher Janaway, John Atwell, and Julian Young in Dale Jacquette, ed. *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); by Christopher Janaway and Cheryl Foster in Janaway, *Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*; by Steven Neeley and Frank White in Bart Vandenabeele, ed., *A companion to Schopenhauer* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); and by Wolfgang-Reiner Mann and Alistair Welchman in Sandra Shapshay, ed. *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁶ When the sciences are mentioned, the reference is to the proto-evolutionary topics in Schopenhauer’s later texts, such as WWR 2 (1844) and *Parerga and Paralipomena* (PP) (1851). See the classic, Arthur Lovejoy, “Schopenhauer as an evolutionist,” *The Monist* 21(2) (1911): 195–222 and, recently, Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 54–60 and 88–93.

The very first stage of the process of objectivation is a conflict or rupture within the will as thing-in-itself – *Entzweiung mit sich selbst* or *Selbstentzweiung*, as Schopenhauer calls it.¹⁷ It is a spontaneous, internal dynamics related to the will's proper nature – willing relentlessly, without any reason or finality, and with no boundaries. It is a principle of differentiation within the undifferentiated which accounts for the foundation of the general *Polarität* exhibited by forces and phenomena in nature:¹⁸ “polarity (i.e. the separation of one force into two qualitatively different and opposed activities that strive to be reunited), which generally reveals itself spatially by separating into opposite directions, is a basic type for almost all the appearances of nature, from the magnet and the crystal up to human beings” (WWR 1, 168).¹⁹

Polarity starts at the most elementary level – “steady pressure and resistance can be regarded as the objecthood of the will on the very lowest level, and expresses its character even there” (WWR 1, 174) – and puts in motion the process of production of the natural world, which follows a course from the simpler and more general natural forms to the more complex and specific (WWR 1, 174–7). Here Schopenhauer develops a notion taken from the tradition – the *Stufenfolge* – which views the natural forms as ordered according to an ascending series of complexity and perfection: The will “enters into objectivation in as infinite a number of gradations” or “degrees of manifestation” (WWR 1, 153).²⁰

It is not clear why the perpetual willing of the will should raise an internal conflict, why this internal conflict should be a principle of differentiation, and why conflict should necessarily lead to a polarity. The

¹⁷ “Internal rupture that is essential to the will” (WWR 1, 171). For a more detailed description of this notion, see Eduard May, “Schopenhauers Lehre von der Selbstentzweiung des Willens,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 33 (1949–50): 1–9.

¹⁸ It has also a polemical intention against Schelling's notion of the Absolute (as discussed in in WWR 1, § 7) and his *Naturphilosophie* as metaphysically unfounded, “the mistake of supposing that the ideal reached by physics would be philosophy” (MR 1, §328, 226). On the criticism of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, see Marco Segala, “Schopenhauer è antischellinghiano?,” *Rivista di Filosofia* XCII (2001): 235–65.

¹⁹ Polarity is a notion indebted to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), as admitted in WWR 1, 174, where Schopenhauer reminds that matter “is correctly described by Kant as repulsive and attractive force [and] exists only in the conflict of opposed forces.”

²⁰ In the background of this *Stufenfolge* there is the progressive graded series of forms analyzed by Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); but in the case of Schopenhauer the most relevant sources of this notion were Schelling and the naturalist Karl Friedrich Kiemeier: see Arthur Hübscher, “Kielmeyers Manuskripte,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 64 (1983): 154–61 and Marco Segala, *Schopenhauer, la filosofia, le scienze* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2009), 254–6 and 305–7.

inverse supposition – that conflict is inferred as the best explanation for polarity – would lead Schopenhauer to replicate the mistake he attributed to Schelling of deriving a metaphysical explanation from scientific investigation.²¹ This would run counter to Schopenhauer's firm intention to distinguish his *Philosophie der Natur* from Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as well as to redefine the relationship between metaphysics and the sciences.²² He was convinced that the metaphysical underpinning provided by the will would lead to a defensible philosophy of nature, explaining the formation of the physical forces in the natural world – the unsolved problem of the natural sciences.

The importance of the sciences is even more evident when considering the doctrine of Ideas. As explanations of the natural forces, they are the backbone of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of nature and sustain his famous anti-reductionism and anti-materialism.²³ Atwell has claimed that Schopenhauer holds on to the natural forces because "to give up the forces would compel one to give up the Ideas."²⁴ The converse is probably truer: without the Ideas Schopenhauer would have trouble explaining the forces as he evokes them in WWR I.²⁵ They are the ultimate findings of the sciences and display the regularity of nature under the notion of natural law (WWR I, 122). Without the natural forces the entire edifice of science would collapse; but since science cannot explain them, they become objects of philosophical investigation (WWR I, 166), and acknowledged as Ideas.

All of this seems to be on fairly solid ground until the notion of Idea fails because of the sciences themselves. Whereas in aesthetics the Ideas serve the task very well, in Book 2 it is precisely the interaction with the sciences that makes the doctrine problematic. On the one hand, from the metaphysical point of view there is no ontological distinction between forces and Ideas: they are one and the same thing, and moreover, they are the only real things (WWR I, 303). On the other hand, they are objects for a subject, and

²¹ Actually, some of the first reviewers of WWR I viewed Schopenhauer as a follower of Schelling's: see Reinhard Piper, "Die Zeitgenössischen Rezensionen der Werke Arthur Schopenhauers. Zweiter Teil: 1819–1825," *Jahrbuch der Schopenhauers Gesellschaft* 6 (1917): 47–168, where the reviews are collected.

²² See section 5 of this chapter for more on the relationship between science and metaphysics. It is worth noting that Schopenhauer used the term *Philosophie der Natur*, not *Naturphilosophie*, when referring to his philosophy of nature.

²³ Even though there is "an unmistakable analogy between all things" (WWR I, 168), the forces–Ideas are irreducible to one another and "the natural sciences are certainly wrong to try to reduce the higher levels of the will's objecthood to the lower ones" (WWR I, 167).

²⁴ Atwell, *Character of the World*, 70.

²⁵ Indeed, in WWR 2 and PP Schopenhauer would dismiss the Ideas from philosophy of nature and look for an alternative philosophical view of the natural forces. See section 5 of this chapter.

one should conclude that Ideas/forces do not exist without a knowing subject – which appears contrary to common sense: We consider that gravity exists and operates independently from an observer.²⁶ There is no world without subjects (human beings) and no humanity without the world: “the Idea of a human being cannot be presented alone and in isolation but rather must be accompanied by the stepwise descent through all . . . forms . . .; they form a pyramid with human beings at the very top” (WWR I, 178).

This claim together with the notion of *Stufenfolge* – “the one will objectifies itself in all Ideas; and in striving for the highest possible objectivation, it now abandons the lower levels of its appearance after a conflict between them, in order to appear on a higher and thus more powerful level” (WWR I, 170) – elucidate that the organic world is dominated by a general harmony of the different forms, an *a priori* finality:

the clear and deeply grasped knowledge of that harmony, . . . that necessity of their gradation . . . – all these open to us a true and adequate insight into the inner essence and significance of the undeniable *purposiveness* of all the products of organic nature, a purposiveness which must even be presupposed *a priori* when we think and make judgements about them. (WWR I, 179)

Following Kant and Schelling – explicitly the former, implicitly the latter²⁷ – Schopenhauer distinguishes between the internal purposiveness exhibited by the different parts of an organism and the external purposiveness that explains the reciprocal relationships among organisms and their surrounding environment. He also specifies that his teleological view agrees with “Kant’s doctrine, which claims that both the purposiveness of the organic as well as the lawlikeness of the inorganic are imported into nature only by our own understanding” (WWR I, 182).

Like the natural forces, then, teleology is a rational construct which is metaphysically explained by the doctrine of Ideas, but again this explanation comes at a cost. Our teleological view of the world is related to scientific explanations which require a temporal succession: There is no vegetation if there isn’t, temporally speaking, soil to nourish it; no fish before there is sea. And yet, the process of objectivation of the Ideas is atemporal:

²⁶ Atwell, *Character of the World*, 138–9, confronts these questions but he improperly distinguishes between “natural species and natural forces (patterns or prototypes in nature) [which] exist unconditionally” and “their philosophical counterparts (i.e., the Ideas) [which] exist only in relation to a knowing subject.” The distinction is not ontological but only epistemic: Forces are concepts devised by reason through scientific research; Ideas are things, objects of immediate intuition.

²⁷ On the relationship with them concerning teleology, see Segala, *Schopenhauer, la filosofia, le scienze*, 309–15.

accordingly, this type of explanation can also be used retrospectively, and we must not only assume that each species adjusts itself to the given circumstances, but that these temporally prior circumstances themselves likewise took into account the being that was yet to come . . . Thus for our present purposes, the temporal sequence is entirely meaningless with respect to the manner in which the objectivation of the will distributes itself among the Ideas, and the Ideas whose appearances entered into the temporal sequence earlier, in accordance with the law of causality (to which they are subject), gain no advantage over those whose appearance enters later, which are rather precisely the most perfect objectivations of the will; the earlier ones needed to adapt to them just as much as they needed to adapt to the earlier ones. (WWR I, 184–5)

Schopenhauer has no hesitation about this: He dismisses the temporality that is required by the scientific description of the natural processes – and he does this with the support of his metaphysics of nature.²⁸

Such an attitude, however, seems at odds with this claim: “The aetiology of nature and the philosophy of nature will never detract from one another; they go hand in hand, observing the same object from different points of view” (WWR I, 165). They actually do seem in conflict, however, for at least three reasons: There seems no good philosophical argument for why the *Selbstentzweigung* is independent from the sciences; the subject-independent concepts of the sciences (forces, species, and temporality) clash with the view that scientific research is confined to the subjective world of representation; and, finally, the doctrine of Ideas appears inconsistent with scientific knowledge.²⁹

4 The New Philosophy of Science

Schopenhauer was aware that his metaphysics of nature was problematic and required a “somewhat difficult discussion” (WWR I, 182). Commenting on his complex discussion of the *Stufenfolge* he even requested the reader’s cooperation “to overcome the obscurity that clings to the substance of these thoughts” (WWR I, 170).

The difficulties originated from the fact that his metaphysics of nature tried to reconcile two different views of the relationship between science

²⁸ Commentators have generally given little attention to the question of teleology, and, when they do, they do not consider the temporality problem. See, for example, Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), 73–7.

²⁹ Discussing Schopenhauer’s recognition of evolution of species in time, as discussed in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851), is beyond the limits of this chapter, but it is evident that Ideas cannot fit the evolutionary picture. On this, see Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 56–7.

and philosophy. On the one hand, it was indebted to the model of the previous philosophies of nature – especially those developed by Kant and Schelling – which inquired not only into the “what” but also into the ultimate “why” and “how” of the physical world.³⁰ They assumed a continuity between metaphysics and the sciences, that is to say, regarded the sciences as branches of metaphysics and as having their meaning rooted in philosophy itself. In the context of this tradition, philosophy of nature provided the foundation of scientific knowledge. Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) explained “why” and “how” Newton’s mechanics worked and was successful, while Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* (as developed in the period 1797–1803) established the metaphysical import of polarity and the foundation of existing and future theories on chemistry, magnetism, biology, and so on. Within philosophy of nature the sciences retained their fundamental togetherness and their results were organized into a metaphysical system that displayed a unified knowledge reflecting the essential unity of nature.

On the other hand, Schopenhauer started to consider the sciences as independent from philosophy. For him, a true philosophical system must acknowledge the autonomous value of science. Consequently, *Philosophie der Natur* should not provide a metaphysical foundation of the scientific investigation, but rather a space of “translation” where metaphysics and the sciences are supposed to interact – a conceptual scaffold filled in by content independently derived from scientific findings and a construction for combining two different ways of describing the world. To give an example of how this translational space would work: natural forces are scientific concepts that explain how to apply a natural law according to the principle of sufficient reason (WWR I, 121), while Ideas are metaphysical objects which multiply themselves “into countless appearances in space and time” (WWR I, 159). Although they seem to be two different, unrelated notions, philosophy of nature aims to show that they coincide: “[T]he original forces themselves are its object, and it sees in them the different levels of objectivation of the will” (WWR I, 166).

Philosophy of nature as translational space for metaphysics and science has been largely overlooked by commentators, given their view of the sciences in WWR I as ancillary. Actually, it represented a substantial novelty with respect to traditional philosophy of nature: It was no longer foundational but rather sought to “translate” what a scientist says, for

³⁰ On the importance of Kant and Schelling’s philosophies of nature, see Marco Segala, *Schopenhauer, la filosofia, le scienze*, 288–96.

example, about a force and the natural law expressing it into a metaphysical discourse about the corresponding Idea. Accordingly, he writes that the law of nature “is the relation of the Idea to the form of its appearance” (WWR I, 159). Yet, such a novelty was hampered by Schopenhauer himself – that is, by his appropriation of the notions of analogy, polarity, *Stufenfolge*, and purposiveness from traditional philosophy of nature. In Kant and Schelling those notions were related to scientific knowledge but defined and grounded by philosophy.³¹ In Schopenhauer, they were defined by the sciences and reinterpreted by philosophy. As we have seen while analyzing the role of temporality in the purposiveness of the *Stufenfolge*, however, such a philosophical reinterpretation involves considerable difficulties when science provides a view of the world that is different from, irreducible to, or, worse still, contradicts the metaphysical doctrine.

Schopenhauer’s philosophy of nature as “space of translation” was still not enough to address the fracture between science and philosophy, conceived as independent disciplines. In WWR I the contribution of scientific research to philosophical knowledge became thorny precisely because of their respective autonomies. In the end, the “space of translation” solution was unsatisfying, and he eventually asked his readers to put aside the details and appreciate the bigger picture of a powerful threefold metaphysics. The Ideas were its backbone: They explained the plurality of natural forces and kinds, the variety of aesthetic experiences, and – by the equivalence between Idea and intelligible character – the individuality and transcendental freedom of each person. But it was precisely in the philosophy of nature that the Ideas emerged as unfit for the task, and the reviewers were unforgiving in highlighting the weaknesses of a metaphysics of nature that drew upon too many concepts from Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.³²

Additional evidence of Schopenhauer’s dissatisfaction is the fact that after the publication of WWR I he immediately focused his attention on the question of the sciences and started a process of revision that gave more prominence to the separation between metaphysics and the sciences,

³¹ Kant’s *Third Critique* properly provided the metaphysical foundation of *Zweckmäßigkeit*. See John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 157–61. Schelling’s *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799) grounded the notions of polarity and *Stufenfolge* on the metaphysical doctrine of the potencies.

³² Contemporary scholars, too, have sometimes challenged the consistency of the doctrine of Ideas. They generate “a great deal of nonsense,” writes Julian Young in *Schopenhauer*, 105; Shapshay, in *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 47–8, disputes their consistency with monism. Their criticisms, however, are generally directed at the metaphysical doctrine per se and the question of whether they are needed for Schopenhauer’s aesthetics; including these scholarly discussions in the present chapter, however, would take us too far from the subject of the sciences.

eclipsing the philosophy of nature as a place of interplay between metaphysics and the sciences – in particular, Ideas as metaphysical counterparts of forces. In the 1820 *Vorlesungen* he was cautious in mentioning the Ideas while presenting scientific themes: He introduced scientific notions – force and natural law – and philosophical terms related to the sciences – cause, analogy, polarity, aetiology, and morphology – without even mentioning them.³³ They only entered in the picture in the context of the metaphysical explanation of nature provided by *Stufenfolge* and teleology.³⁴

The following year, in the manuscript book *Foliant*, Schopenhauer confronted the question of the relationship between metaphysics and the sciences in a completely new way. He introduced the notion of

philosophy of natural science (*Philosophie der Naturwissenschaft*), that is to say an application of philosophical truths to natural science . . . It is the gathering of the principal results of the science into a general view of its subject which at the same time states the true method of treating such a science. . . . It therefore stands midway between the special science whose philosophy it is and *philosophy pure and simple* (*Philosophie schlechthin*), the philosophy of the world which is in general the most universal of all truths. (MR 3, 95–6: *Foliant* §37).

This new conceptualization – the philosophy of the natural sciences, as opposed to the earlier *Philosophie der Natur* – eventually entered *On the Doctrine of Science* (WWR 2, chapter 12, 136–7).³⁵ It reaffirms the reciprocal autonomies of philosophy and the sciences and introduces a novelty with respect to the “translational” philosophy of nature: the autonomy from metaphysics of the philosophies of science themselves. They arise “independently from universal philosophy, . . . [and] do not have to wait for universal philosophy to be finally discovered, instead they have been worked out in advance” (WWR 2, 136–7). As a consequence, they can be investigated by either philosophers with a deep knowledge of the sciences or scientists who are able to envisage philosophical generalizations,³⁶ whereas the earlier philosophy of nature was eminently a philosopher’s subject.

³³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Philosophische Vorlesungen II*, in *Sämtliche Werke* 10, ed. Franz Mockrauer (Munich: Piper, 1913), 107–35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 135–67.

³⁵ “Confirmation” (*Bestätigung*) was another notion pertaining to the new philosophy of science: it became the cornerstone of *On Will in Nature* (1836). On the relationship of *Foliant* §37 with Schopenhauer’s works, see Marco Segala, “Schopenhauer and the empirical confirmations of philosophy,” *Idealistic Studies* 40 (2010): 27–41.

³⁶ WWR 2, 137 mentions Goethe, Kiemeyer, Lamarck, Geoffroy St-Hilaire, and Cuvier. MR 3, 96 enlists Schelling, too.

Schopenhauer's characterization of philosophy of science after WWR I provides further evidence of his interest in the sciences and their meaning for philosophy. He acknowledged the process of specialization in the sciences that was occurring at the time. Such a process of "professionalization," as historians have termed it,³⁷ was accompanied by coinage of the word "scientist" in 1834³⁸ and by a new kind of inquiry that took the sciences as its subject: history and philosophy of science. Ampère's *Essai sur la philosophie des sciences* (1834) and Whewell's *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, Founded upon Their History* (1840) are commonly considered the first books dedicated to the discipline, which is obviously still practiced today. Schopenhauer's text in *Foliant* §37, in fact, anticipated both Ampère and Whewell, but his conceptualization of the philosophy of science is more important today than his being the first to coin the term. It is characterized by a committed exploration of the delicate issue concerning the relationship between metaphysics and the sciences. Today, philosophers of science debate the role that philosophy plays with respect to the progressive knowledge of the sciences. They are concerned with what sort of scientific knowledge philosophers should refer to so as to strengthen their arguments, and the desirability of scientific support for metaphysics.³⁹ On these issues Schopenhauer provided insightful answers that, I suggest, deserve the attention of contemporary philosophers.

The 1821 manuscript proposes two different approaches to the understanding of natural phenomena: On the one hand, there is the pairing "general philosophy and metaphysics of nature," which is concerned with the essence of nature; on the other hand, there is the pairing "philosophy of

³⁷ Regarding this major shift in Germany, see the classical studies by Steven R. Turner "The Growth of Professorial Research in Prussia, 1818 to 1848 – Causes and Context." *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 3 (1971), 137–182; and Rudolf Stichweh, *Zur Entstehung des modernen Systems wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen. Physik in Deutschland, 1740–1890* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984). Jack B. Morrell, "Professionalisation," in *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, eds. R. C. Olby, G. N. Cantor, J. R. R. Christie, and M. J. S. Hodge (London: Routledge, 1990), 980–9 provides a useful summary of the process of professionalization. On the relevance of this major shift in the history of science for Schopenhauer, see Segala, *Schopenhauer, la filosofia, le scienze*, 345–6.

³⁸ See John Heilbron, "Scientist," in *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. J. Heilbron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 744–5, for a brief history of the term since 1834, when William Whewell conceived it.

³⁹ On the cogency of these questions in contemporary philosophy of science, see for example Brian Ellis, *Scientific Essentialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Alexander Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), James Ladyman and Don Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Tim Maudlin, *The Metaphysics within Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Stephen Mumford and Matthew Tugby, eds., *Metaphysics and Science*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The anti-metaphysical stances of empiricists or neopositivists prevent them from discussing these questions.

science and natural sciences,” which together investigate and elaborate generalizations about nature (MR 3, 97). Book 2 of WWR 1 was concerned with the former pair and is mainly an exposition of the metaphysics of nature, whereas the corresponding Book 2 of WWR 2 focuses on the latter pair and has a more extensive treatment of scientific contents, discussing their meaning in view of the metaphysical explanation of the world – as is the case in more contemporary philosophy of science. Such a shift of focus is accompanied by a distinctive shift of content, namely, the absence of the doctrine of Ideas from the Supplements to Book 2. In WWR 2, the findings of the natural sciences are directly explained by the metaphysical view that everything is will, and no longer by the Ideas. It is the most striking consequence of Schopenhauer’s new view concerning the sciences.⁴⁰

The jettisoning of the Ideas in WWR 2 with respect to the philosophy of nature, entailed costs as well as benefits. On the one hand, without the intermediation of the Ideas the temporality of the *Stufenfolge* as described by the natural sciences no longer conflicts with the metaphysical explanation (WWR 2, *On Teleology*). The intricate question of the temporality of the *Stufenfolge* in WWR 1 depended on the detailed description of the construction of the world in the nontemporal domain of the Ideas, which did not correspond to the scientific, temporal description of the same process. Without the Ideas, there is no longer an ideal, nontemporal *Stufenfolge*, which conflicts with the scientific, temporal one within the translational philosophy of nature. In *On Teleology* there is merely the nontemporal will which becomes an object of cognition, as temporal *Stufenfolge*, under the forms of space, time, and causality.⁴¹ It is no longer a conflict, because the objectivation of the will pertains to metaphysics of nature, while the temporal *Stufenfolge* is a scientific description – and no correspondence or translation between the two is required.

On the other hand, relinquishing the Ideas has the unfortunate consequence of depriving the system of an explication of the natural forces. As in the first volume, force is presented in the second as a “qualitas occulta” (WWR 2, 262, 326, 348), as “mysterious [*geheimnißvolle*]” (WWR 2, 262,

⁴⁰ The Ideas are absent from all of the publications related to philosophy of nature after 1819. To my knowledge, only Shapshay, *Reconstructing Schopenhauer’s Ethics*, 54–60 has noted this absence.

⁴¹ Moreover, such emphasis on cognition provides a more convincing series of arguments in favor of the Kantian view that purposiveness in nature is merely intellectual: “[T]his agreement of the parts with each other, with the whole of the organism, and with its goals in the external world, as we apprehend and judge it by means of cognition, . . . as it exists for the intellect, it was also brought about by an intellect” (WWR 2, 341).

329), “inexplicable [*unerklärliche*]” (WWR 2, 313), and “unfathomable [*unerforschliche, unergründliche*]” (WWR 2, 282, 326, 348) – but now the enigma left by the sciences cannot be explained by the Ideas. Schopenhauer was ready to accept this inconvenience and, as in *On Will in Nature*, he claimed that “the cognition of the will in self-consciousness” (WWR 2, 260) explained the ultimate essence of forces.

5 “I Believe in Metaphysics” (WWR 2, 185)

With respect to the relationship between science and philosophy, the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* is very different from the first. Both deal with the general problem Schopenhauer confronted after departing from the traditional view of philosophy of nature (as in Kant and Schelling) as the foundation of science, namely, how to establish a dialogue between philosophy and the sciences, each now conceived as an independent domain of inquiry.⁴² The solution of WWR 1 is a nonfoundational philosophy of nature, where metaphysics of nature and the sciences interact as equals: The former provides – through the objectivation of the will in different gradations, that is, the Ideas – the definitive explanations of the unanswered questions left by the latter. But WWR 2 puts aside the metaphysics of nature as objectivation of the will into Ideas and shows greater interest in the sciences and their special philosophies. These now provide the philosophical interpretation of the sciences – a philosophy of science and no longer a philosophy of nature – and this interpretation “will always harmonise with true philosophy” (MR 3, 96),⁴³ which is accessible in ourselves: “[T]he ultimate and most important disclosures concerning the essence of things can be drawn only from self-consciousness Human beings carry the ultimate and fundamental mystery within themselves, and it is immediately accessible to them” (WWR 2, 188).

This process is described in the last pages of the supplements to Book 1 (the second part of the chapter “On Humanity’s Metaphysical Need”) and pursued in the supplementary chapters of Book 2, after expressing the centrality of scientific knowledge:

⁴² Commentators have neglected this crucial, starting point of Schopenhauer’s inquiry. Malter, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 44 has noted the question from the inverse perspective: If the Will as essence is beyond the reach of reason, how is it possible to treat it rationally? But this approach misses entirely the problem of the sciences.

⁴³ As is the case with contemporary metaphysicians, Schopenhauer does not justify the harmonization between general philosophy and the special philosophy of each science; it is as a self-evident truth. If there is a metaphysical truth about the world, then it must be coherent with scientific findings about the world.

it should also be noted that the most perfect possible cognition of nature is the correct *statement of the problem* of metaphysics: and therefore nobody should venture on this without having previously acquired a thorough, clear, and coherent (if only general) understanding of all the branches of natural science. For the problem must precede the solution. (WWR 2, 188)

The lack of a metaphysics of nature in WWR 2 results in a discontinuity with the general systematic project of WWR 1, and what remains of the original metaphysical project is the will as we experience it inside ourselves: It satisfies our metaphysical need, is the common thread in the books of WWR 2, and connects the two volumes of *The World as Will and Representation*. It seems that there is no such retraction of metaphysics, and especially the Ideas, with respect to Books 3 and 4 of WWR 2, but it would go beyond the limits of this contribution to analyze this topic.

Nevertheless, we can detect an underlying disinvestment of metaphysical commitment throughout WWR 2. Its last chapter ("Epiphilosophy") describes Schopenhauer's philosophy as "immanent" and limited (WWR 2, 657–8); "On Humanity's Metaphysical Need" claims that metaphysics is no more than "deciphering of the world," (WWR 2, 191–3) and "On the Possibility of Cognizing the Thing in Itself" downgrades the value of the inner cognition of the body as will. While the first volume claimed that it is immediate and undoubted (WWR 1, 40–2, 125–6), the second volume asserts that "even the inner perception we have of our own will in no way provides an exhaustive and adequate cognition of the thing in itself. This would be the case if the cognition were completely immediate" (WWR 2, 207). Rather, it is mediated by the intellect and then "cognition of the thing in itself is not perfectly adequate" (WWR 2, 208).

Such an admission of the limitations of metaphysical insight has been tempting for those commentators who have questioned the consistency of Schopenhauer's metaphysics.⁴⁴ They have suggested that the problematic knowledge of the essence advanced in WWR 1 – untenable by one who proclaimed himself as Kant's true heir – is corrected by the hermeneutic view described in WWR 2.⁴⁵ But this view of the second volume as a genuine, metaphysically deflationary departure from the noumenal philosophy of the first volume can be challenged by three considerations: (a) Schopenhauer was explicit about WWR 2 as merely a volume of *Supplements*, not as a second edition or definitive version of WWR 1;

⁴⁴ See G. Stephen Neeley, "The Consistency of Schopenhauer's Metaphysics," in Vandenabeele, *Companion to Schopenhauer*, 105–19 for a general review of this kind of criticism.

⁴⁵ Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 214 has defined as 'hermeneutical' the will metaphysics of WWR.

(b) WWR 2 was added to WWR 1 in 1844 and 1859, but Schopenhauer never planned to discontinue the publication of the first volume, thus signaling the first volume's ongoing validity as an exposition of his system; (c) the more "naturalistic metaphysics"⁴⁶ of WWR 2 is largely due to the different view he takes of the sciences post-WWR 1.

On (a), as early as 1821 Schopenhauer envisaged a second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* (MR 3, 97–8),⁴⁷ and, in the following years, he planned an appendix of "additions to the second edition" (MR 3, 344) and an edition of "addenda" (MR 4, 155) that would follow "the example of Malebranche who added the *éclaircissements* to his book *Recherches de la vérité*" (MR 3, 559). Thus, the second volume was never considered as an alternative or definitive version of the first. In fact, Schopenhauer never ceased to "believe in metaphysics" (WWR 2, 185) nor abandoned – as he wrote in 1838 – the prospect of an organic system of "Metaphysik der Natur, Metaphysik der Sitten, und Metaphysik des Schönen [als] Erklärung des Wesens der Dinge und des Daseyns überhaupt [Metaphysics of nature, metaphysics of morals, and metaphysics of beauty as explanation of the essence of things and of existence in general]."⁴⁸ Therefore (b): Schopenhauer did not want to dismantle the original metaphysical system, but supplemented it with a less metaphysically invested perspective. The first volume was still valid, but the second was better adapted to the development of scientific knowledge. In respect of (c), WWR 2 displays an impressive quality and quantity of references and arguments related to the sciences which, through philosophy of science, converges toward a "naturalization" of philosophy in three main ways: We see a "physiologization" of epistemology;⁴⁹ the "hermeneutical"

⁴⁶ This is the expression chosen by Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 28–33.

⁴⁷ The manuscripts register a series of drafts of prefaces to the second edition. See Alfred Estermann, *Arthur Schopenhauer. Szenen aus der Umgebung der Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2000), chapter 3.

⁴⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Spicilegia: Philosophische Notizen aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Ernest Zeigler (München: C.H. Beck, 2015), 168. See also MR 4, 29: "[T]he man who is to explain any philosophical problem without drawing up a system of the whole philosophy, necessarily furnishes only a fragment."

⁴⁹ Chapter 1 of WWR 2 characterizes the transcendental forms of knowledge in physiological (neurological) terms and repeatedly claims that reality is "a *phenomenon of the brain*" (WWR 2, 6) or "brain function" (WWR 2, 7). This notion of "physiologization" is presented by Maurice Mandelbaum, "The Physiological Orientation of Schopenhauer's Epistemology," in *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement*, ed. Michael Fox (Hassocks, UK: The Harvester Press, 1980): 50–67 and is an elaboration of the "paradox of the brain" first discussed by Eduard Zeller, *Geschichte der deutschen Philosophie seit Leibniz* (München: Oldenburg, 1873), 885, and a century later by Benno Schlesinger, "Zu Schopenhauers Hirnparadoxon," *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 59 (1978): 184–5.

metaphysics of the will; and metaphysics of nature without the Ideas. These different naturalizations were, I contend, the result of Schopenhauer's rethinking of the sciences and their autonomy vis-à-vis philosophy.

The striking differences between Book 2 in the first volume and its supplements in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* are challenging. It seems arduous to justify a consistency between the two, and so commentators have generally spoken of incoherence or a transition from the first to the second. I contest such a conclusion, as it does not take into account the fact the Schopenhauer never abandoned WWR 1. I suggest, instead, that we treat them as two different perspectives, one irreducible to the other, on the same basic question of "What is the world?," where the differences are mainly related to the relationship between philosophy and the sciences.

When Schopenhauer acknowledged the specialization of the scientific disciplines, he also conceded that philosophy of nature as a unique space of interaction between metaphysics and science was problematic; then, in WWR 2, he pursued the alternative approach of the philosophies (plural) of the sciences. He admitted that a philosophical account of the sciences required a more sophisticated procedure, and the supplements to Book 2 proved that his system was flexible enough to accommodate the ever-shifting content of the sciences. In the first volume, the accent is on the metaphysics of nature, its doctrine of Ideas, and philosophy of nature as a translation space between science and metaphysics. In the second volume, the focus is on the philosophy of science, which shows that is possible to deal with the sciences and their findings without being committed to a metaphysical system. This is different from denying metaphysics – and this is the reason why there is no inconsistency between the two volumes. The supplements to Book 2 do not mention the Ideas and deflate the metaphysical import of their chapters, but they also do not repudiate the metaphysics of the will or the existence of the Ideas – which in fact have still a prominent role in the supplements to Book 3.

A methodological consequence of this interpretation is that any discussion of Schopenhauer's views of philosophy, nature, and the sciences should not rely interchangeably on WWR 1 and 2, but should carefully distinguish between them, as they represent two different standpoints that Schopenhauer took to the understanding of nature.

Pushing Back: Reading The World as Will and Representation as a Woman

Judith Norman

1 Introduction – the Woman Question

I propose to approach the “woman question” in Schopenhauer from an original angle. It is true that Schopenhauer was deeply misogynistic, but it is not clear how philosophically interesting this accurate description might be. Questions of Schopenhauer’s misogyny focus on the extent to which he regarded women as objects of philosophical interest or of personal antagonism; I propose, by contrast, to think not just *about* women but *as* a woman, which is to say I propose to consider women not as philosophical objects but philosophizing subjects, and not with regard to “Schopenhauer,” but instead with regard to a text, *The World as Will and Representation*.¹

On the face of it, this does not seem like a particularly engaging philosophical question, much less a “woman question.” Schopenhauer never denied that women are capable of thinking philosophical thoughts. However, I do not want to look at this empirically, but rather philosophically; that is, to think about the extent to which the subject of philosophy could be, not a *universal* subject (“a winged cherub without a body,”² as Payne so marvelously renders it), but a *gendered* subject. Is the subject of philosophy sexed? Is sexual difference ontological difference in *The World as Will and Representation*?

The Cambridge *Critical Guide* series seeks to focus philosophical attention on texts rather than authors. And so the concept of this volume invites us contributors to think about *The World as Will and Representation* rather than about Schopenhauer. I believe it is very helpful, given the questions I wish to address, to be in conversation with a text rather than a philosopher. Indeed, this text-based approach helps remove some obstacles to a feminist appropriation – the “great man” theory of philosophy

¹ Many thanks to Alistair Welchman for his help and suggestions in writing this essay.

² Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 99.

assumes just the sort of mastery relation of the philosopher over his text that I will be trying to put into question. But if, as Barthes claimed, the death of the author is the birth of the reader, it is still the case that there are different sorts of readers. I am a woman reader. Does the text belong to me? Or does it belong to me only if I promise to lose myself in the universal? What is at stake is not simply the question of women (an undefinable concept), but the question of multiplicity and difference.³

2 Mastery

In the case of *The World as Will and Representation*, however much we dismiss the figure of an author looming *over* the text, we cannot ignore the extent to which an author figure lurks *within* it. Unlike major philosophical texts by Kant and Hegel, which efface their own authorship and assume an air of impersonal objectivity, WWR is strongly marked by the authorial presence of an avatar of Schopenhauer. This intrusive authorial effect directs the reader's attention, lodges jealous accusations of plagiarism against other authors, chides us for our insufficient mastery of Schopenhauer's earlier texts, and, most importantly, makes repeated proprietorial claims that it alone is responsible for organizing the meaning of the text. The text, it insists, is the working out of its own "single thought" (WWR I, 284).⁴

The result of this insistent "authorial" presence is that the text refers itself to a dominating subject voice. And there are grounds for thinking that this (constructed) subject is specifically masculine – that the philosophical subject in control of the text is gendered male. An argument can be made for this assertion on the entirely general grounds that the intellect in the tradition of European philosophy has been implicated in a power structure of dominance which has been gendered strongly as masculine.⁵ Moreover, there is a complicity, as Rosi Braidotti says, "between the dominant notion of 'subjectivity' and the image of triumphant masculinity."⁶ The subject is

³ I do not regard "woman" as an essential category. In posing the question of women in the text, I am not concerned to find an essential female voice in contrast to an essential male voice, but to see whether there is room for a plurality of different-bodied subjects. I use the category of women as a pressure point to open up this wider question.

⁴ Thomas Grimwood points out, "the very assertion of [Schopenhauer's] authorship – the assertion of a singular, authorizing, meaning of the text – is a continuous inscription of the boundaries of subjectivity"; Thomas Grimwood, "The Limits of Misogyny: Schopenhauer, 'On Women'," *Kritike*, 2(2) (2008): 135.

⁵ For a review of this literature, see Phyllis Rooney, "Recent Work in Feminist Discussions of Reason," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31(1) (1994): 1–21.

⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Guild (New York: Routledge, 1991), 9.

conceived in contrast to a feminized irrational other, such as emotion, nature (or the body),⁷ and valued to the extent that it can subordinate or exclude this other and assert control of the process of philosophy. In Schopenhauer's infamous later essay, "On Women," the excluded other is in fact women themselves. In his careful reading of the text, Thomas Grimwood argues that the essay is not simply a misogynistic screed, as is often thought, but rather a systematic attempt to demonstrate that women cannot occupy a subject position, either morally or economically.⁸ Men, by contrast, can – moral and economic subjects must be male.⁹

This conclusion is of great interest for the purposes of my essay, but not decisive toward resolving whether sexual difference operates on a metaphysical level in WWR. Gender is often thought of as a merely empirical difference – superficial and only contingently related to cognition or subjectivity. But if masculinity is normative, as it could well be in both texts (implicitly in WWR, by virtue of the philosophical voice being construed on a dominance model, and explicitly in "On Women," by virtue of women being excluded), then masculinity, at least, is not contingent at all but a necessary feature of a fully constituted subject. And although this is relevant to the question of the relation between subjectivity and gender, it falls short of addressing the question of sexual difference.

It is important to see why this is the case. It is clear that "On Women" operates with a traditional conception of masculinity as dominance, and an equally traditional conception of femininity as deficiency. Women are defined, certainly when it comes to cognition, not by what we have but by what we lack. Masculinity occupies the position of the universal, and femininity falls outside of the universal. Women are like men, only not very good men. Our moral and economic capabilities fall short of what is required for full subjectivity. This conception of femininity does not enable any interesting conception of sexual difference. There are no two poles that might differ – there is one normative pole, masculinity, and any

⁷ The fact that WWR, like the *Critique of Pure Reason*, denigrated reason in favor of other intellectual faculties ("Reason is of a feminine nature: it can give only after it has received" [WWR 1, 75]) does not refute this point. Different traditions might disagree over which faculty of intellect is superior, but the superiority of intellect itself is not in question.

⁸ Grimwood, "The Limits of Misogyny," 135.

⁹ Catherine Hauer writes: "A woman can rarely be in anything other than the object position. She is typically not a subject, in a sentence or in Schopenhauer's metaphysical universe. In fact, syntactically speaking, 'woman' is in the position of object or is the object of a preposition using passive voice construction in virtually all of Schopenhauer's use of the word"; Catherine Hauer, "Misogynistic Grammatical Structures in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* and Their Implications," unpublished manuscript, 2017.

given subject is either more or less proximate to that one pole. Being a female subject has no positive meaning or value – it simply marks one as deficient in whatever qualities makes male subjects so successful.

There is evidence, however, that more than this is going on, in Volume 2 of WWR at least, in the essay on the “Metaphysics of Sexual Love.” The essay verges on the suggestion that femininity might bring with it a characteristic knowledge. To begin with, the text makes explicit the masculinity of the authorial position, mentioning, for instance: “the profound sense of earnest with which we examine each of a woman’s body parts, and with which she does the same to us” (WWR 2, 564). The text explicitly aligns with masculine knowledge; there are two sides in the game of sexual desire (although a third lurks suggestively in the appendix to Schopenhauer’s essay), and the text situates its author (and its readers, who are included in the “us”) on one of them. But more significantly, a little later in the text we can note a hint of epistemic modesty attached to the masculinity of the perspective; after specifying the sort of woman that is most sexually attractive to men, down to optimal bosom size, the text states: “Naturally we cannot specify with equal precision the unconscious considerations that determine a woman’s inclination” (WWR 2, 560). It is a strange moment. There is a knowledge specific to women which is apparently (but “naturally”) unavailable to the authorial avatar in the text.¹⁰ Nor would this epistemic deficiency be supplied simply by asking a woman, because the considerations are “unconscious” (although the avatar seems to be in possession of facts about the male unconscious). The lingering blind spot for the text is a familiar one: “What do women want?” It is in this question that the text discovers the gender-specific limitations of the subject of philosophy – the extent to which the subject of knowledge is conditioned by sexual difference.

3 Readership

It is a historical irony that Schopenhauer owed much of the popularity of his texts to women critics, readers, and translators. In her study of the

¹⁰ Ursula Pia Jauch writes: “[T]he discussion of the male intellect clouded by sexual desire corresponds in epistemological content to the argument that as sexual beings the possibility of our achieving insights that would hold universally for sexual subjects is conditioned. In this way Schopenhauer may well have contributed to a gendered critique of metaphysics *avant la lettre*”; Ursula Pia Jauch “Schopenhauer or Kant: Gender Difference between Critique and Spirit of the Age,” trans. James Dodd, in *Continental Philosophy in Feminist Perspective: Re-reading the Canon in German*, eds. Herta Nagl-Docekal and Cornelia Klinger (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 105.

reception of Schopenhauer's texts, Brilmyer points out that British women (such as George Eliot and Helen Zimmern) were among the first to take Schopenhauer seriously, and their often anonymous work facilitated the translation and reception of his texts into English, and from England back to Germany.¹¹ Further, Brilmyer shows how British women found Schopenhauer's theories highly congenial, and found resources in them to articulate and develop a distinctive feminist politics through literary works. Looking at these developments can help us to understand better what a distinctive female voice in WWR might be, or at least, might say.

There were several features of WWR that these British readers and critics found appealing. One was the relative importance the text gives to the body in relation to consciousness – the repeated insistence, in the text, that knowledge is, for the most part, a function of the will, and the idea that a path to an understanding of the will can be had via our experience of our bodies, which are manifestations of will. Brilmyer writes that “Schopenhauer's metaphysics was central to an early form of feminist philosophy, a mode of theorizing characterized by . . . questions concerning the materiality of desire, the experience of the body, and the importance of feeling.”¹² This “early form of feminist philosophy” coheres quite closely with later forms of feminist philosophy. Braidotti writes that “one of the main issues for women in contemporary philosophy is the need to speak about the bodily roots of the thinking process, of all human intellect, and to reconnect theoretical discourse to its libidinal and consequently unconscious foundations.”¹³ She focuses on Nietzsche as the first to provide a theoretical groundwork broadly accommodating of this program. However, Brilmyer's study makes clear that the feminist potential of calling attention to the embodiment of cognition was apparently clear a century earlier, to many British readers of WWR, who argued that this text had already sketched the fundamentals of such a feminist project.

Another appealing feature of the WWR for these feminist readers was the strikingly subordinate role it gave to intellect in the constitution of personal identity, and the strikingly low value to conscious reasoning in the ordering of our affairs. In place of both of these, the text insists on the domination of the will, the prepersonal drives that govern human and natural activity: “originally and essentially . . . cognition is entirely in the service of the will” (WWR 1, 199). The resultant view of humanity is

¹¹ Pearl Brilmyer, “Schopenhauer and British Literary Feminism,” in *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, ed. Sandra Shapshay (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan: 2017), 397–424.

¹² *Ibid.*, 405. ¹³ Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 8

accordingly deflationary with respect to traditional and gendered notions of rational agency and dominance over nature; we are a part of nature, and in thrall to the same forces, not by dint of causal determinism but something more like libidinal fatalism, the inexorable pressure of will to strive to achieve its own end. And, finally, the text gives priority to forms of awareness that undercut rational knowledge, not simply in the preference it gives to intuitive over conceptual knowledge (which is a valuation that, at its basic level, Schopenhauer shares with empiricism in general), but by focusing on nonstandard forms of knowledge such as the immediate awareness we have of our bodies in cognizing the will.¹⁴ These were some of the aspects of the texts that British women found most appealing; in appropriating these ideas for feminism they “exposed contradictions in [Schopenhauer’s] work between his ontology and his politics, reconfiguring his philosophy in order to pose challenges to masculinist models of agency, autonomy, and self-making.”¹⁵

We don’t need to have a naïve or essentialist reading of sexual difference (men = mind/women = body) to see how these readings are in league with feminism. We simply need to understand that traditional, normative notions of agency, which align knowledge with domination, have been historically associated with masculinity – have operated in the construction of masculinity, and functioned ideologically to consolidate patriarchal distributions of power (for instance, by devaluing passivity and emotion and then describing women as passive and/or emotional). But at the same time, the mere act of challenging this model and introducing alternatives need not be remotely feminist; it could simply be the introduction of opposing philosophical ideas, motivated by opposing philosophical considerations. The question at hand was never whether there is a “women’s way of knowing” (whatever that might mean) but whether the subject of knowledge is situated, and, if so, whether gender is one of its situations. The fact that challenges to the traditional, universalizing conception of agency came from raging misogynists like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche confirms the suspicion that the politics often accompanying this challenge is contingent.

I will return to this line of inquiry below. But first I want to point to Brilmyer’s observation that some of these early feminist readers did go on to extract a more essentialist feminism from Schopenhauer’s texts, by

¹⁴ See Cheryl Foster, “The Hour of Consecration: Inspiration and Cognition in Schopenhauer’s *Genius*,” Chapter 4 in this collection.

¹⁵ Brilmyer, “Schopenhauer and British Literary Feminism,” 399.

noting that they often align women fairly systematically with will. For instance, Brilmyer cites *Parerga and Paralipomena's* (PP) claim that: "the 'passions' of women are the very 'expression' of 'nature's will' itself."¹⁶ Helen Zimmern writes, approvingly, that "woman is but one remove from the will to live." Brilmyer remarks: "Zimmern's comments reveal that although Schopenhauer's normative claims excluded women entirely from the picture, focusing instead on the figure of a self-controlled male subject, his ontological claims place a woman at the very base of his metaphysics, aligning them with the force that perpetuates existence."¹⁷

It must be said, however, that although proximity to the will is indeed a position, it is not a subject position. In some ways, WWR can be seen, not as relinquishing a conventional notion of intellectual agency as rational, masculine, and dominant, but rather as retaining this notion, and indicating its defeat. The intellect is not the master of its own house; but this is hardly a cheering thought. Rather, the defeat of the intellect seems, on the surface at least, to be yet another piece of evidence for how awful everything is. This is, after all, basically a philosophy of pessimism. The will is the feminized other that so often overpowers beleaguered cognition. Women's agency, in this model, is like the agency of the Harpies, or Clytemnestra, or the Queen of the Night in the *Magic Flute* – figures of defeat of the masculine. Zimmern's approach would lead us to the sort of feminism that retains sexist categories while reversing the valuation. The question for this essay is not whether there are different sources of power, but whether there are different subjects of knowledge. So, if we are to find female subjects of philosophy in and for WWR, I do not think we should pursue what the text says about the proximity of women to will, but rather return to a discussion of what it says about knowledge, and the possibility it holds out for different subject positions.

4 Affinities

The project of extracting resources for a nonessentialist feminism from WWR is strange enough that I wish to take a slightly more familiar task as a point of entry. As I noted earlier, Nietzsche's texts are in the similar position of allowing for a feminist appropriation¹⁸ that he very much did not himself authorize (and there is a well-established feminist path to his

¹⁶ Ibid., 417; PP 2, 618. ¹⁷ Ibid., 417.

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, quoted in section 3 above; see also Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

door). Moreover, Nietzsche was a devoted reader of WWR, and he drew much inspiration and many philosophical resources from that text. I believe that many of the philosophical positions that lend themselves to feminism in Nietzsche's texts are developments of ideas that appear in WWR as well. In short, I want to start to think about the WWR's proto-feminism by following an Ariadne's thread laid down in Nietzsche's texts.

As with WWR, there is of course no explicitly feminist politics in Nietzsche's texts. However, unlike WWR, Nietzsche's texts do have a very clear and explicit political agenda (political in the sense of aiming at a reconfiguration of power), that of challenging the dominance of Christianity and forging a new path for thought once it is released from hegemonic Christian structures. And one of the key structures to fall with the "death of God" is our image of thought as somehow autonomous. The texts make the argument that the distinction and domination relation between mind and body was only ever a function of the old, dualistic paradigm seen in both Christianity and Plato, and in the service of the Christian/Platonic devaluation of life. (Both Christianity and Plato devalue the body and the immanent world of sensuous reality in favor of the spiritual realm of the transcendent beyond.) Nietzsche's texts introduce a conception of thought as a type of material force (or will), not distinct from the body, and they theorize the development of a new type of body just as much as they theorize a new type of philosophy: a new body capable of affirming life, and a system of thought that is the product of this affirmation. Accordingly, Nietzsche's texts are not intended for a universal readership: Bourgeois, democratic, Wagner-loving decadent bodies are not in a position to be moved by such texts; they (probably "we") don't have ears to hear them, as the *Anti-Christ* complained.

As such, the texts open up a novel conception of philosophical readership – or rather return to a classical conception of readership as addressing an exclusive and elite audience. The text is no longer predicated on an Enlightenment idea of a public or an audience where anyone with the proper, universal, intellectual tools can enter into conversation with any idea and work cooperatively and in good faith toward a consensus about its truth. The text does not acknowledge a universal subject, only particular subjects. And the differences between these particular subjects are rooted in the differences between bodies and material practices. It is not even clear that the notion of the "subject" is expansive enough to survive this adventure.

The dissolution of the universal is another function of the "death of God" in Nietzsche's texts, which present an image of monotheism as a suppression of the creative, pluralistic impulses of pagan, tragic thought.

Having only one god means having only one perspective from which to pronounce judgments of value and truth; accordingly, the destruction of “monotono-theism”¹⁹ introduces a polychromatic array of gods, values, truths, and perspectives – that is, subject positions, each rooted in whatever configuration of will characterizes any given body. It is important to understand the role played in this conception by will to power, the animating material drive that produces the characteristic differences between bodies. This concept of will to power is clearly a philosophical inheritance from WWR, and it grounds Nietzsche’s texts in similarly foundational materialist concerns as can be found in Schopenhauer’s texts, and the same conception of human practice as rooted in prepersonal material forces. At the same time, it functions in Nietzsche’s texts to produce difference – bodies with different capacities, engaged in conflicting practices.

As I said at the start of this discussion, there is clearly no feminist agenda at work in Nietzsche’s texts; but there is a general, iconoclastic challenge to a hegemonic power structure (Christianity) and a will to denaturalize and reconfigure values that had a fixed meaning for so long as to seem immutable. The notions of the universal subject, of universal structures of intellect, the repression of the body, the autonomy of thought – all of these are “idols” that fall under the critical hammer. Moreover, Nietzsche’s texts function in the service of a cautious optimism, which aims to generate (or regenerate) new values and structures of thought in the wake of the destruction (twilight/death) of the old ones – valuing the body over the disembodied mind, fertility (a term that aims to ground “creativity” firmly in the body) over orthodoxy and dogma, and promoting pluralism over the ideal of a normative universality. It is not hard to see how a feminist challenge to the traditional conception of a disembodied universal, normative subjectivity could take root here.

At the same time, we can understand Nietzsche’s avowed anti-feminism as coherent with his generally reactionary politics: He disliked democracy, and saw feminism as a democratic leveling of men and women. The reason that Nietzsche’s texts can be put in the service of a feminism is that their antidemocratic tendency led them to construct a set of tools that can be used to value difference. While feminism is not generally antidemocratic, when it involves the affirmation of the plurality of subject positions, it can seize the opportunities these texts offer.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) §19.

What about the WWR? What resources does a feminist challenge find there? As I said above, this text differs from those of Nietzsche in that there is no clear political agenda – no specific power structure that the text is concerned to overturn. Unlike texts such as *Antichrist*, WWR does not pit its atheism against Christianity, but rather aligns with Christianity's hostility to life while largely ignoring the otherwise important fact that it parts ways with Christianity over the question of the existence of a transcendent god. WWR has its primary antagonists (Hegel, philosophical optimism) but its antagonism is mostly on philosophical grounds; the politics of the antagonism are largely external to the text (the competition for popularity, in the case of Hegel). Within the text the tussle is primarily a philosophical one – in the case of Hegel, over the “pure nonsense” and “senseless, raving tangles of verbiage” (WWR 1, 456) of the ideas that Hegel imposes on the gullible public to general, ignorant approval.

However, the animosity against Hegelian philosophy is worth looking at more closely. The philosophical critique that Hegel's system is “hollowest verbiage” (WWR 1, 18) points to a political dimension of the critique. If Hegel has nothing to say, why does he write? Schopenhauer answers this question, and does so with considerable derision and resentment: Hegel lives *off* rather than *for* philosophy. He is a careerist, a mercenary in the search for truth, whose primary motivation is his own fame and fortune (WWR 1, 19). He is promoting his own interests under cover of the pursuit of truth. In other words, his intellect is enslaved to his will – his philosophy is just a bid at professional advancement. The intellect is not only enthralled to the will when choosing a sexual partner, it can produce philosophy under the influence of desire, and this is the case with Hegel. By contrast, WWR claims on behalf of its noble avatar, Schopenhauer: “I am not the sort of person whose pen is swayed by personal ambition: I strive only for truth, and I write as the ancients wrote, with the sole intention of preserving my thoughts so that they can someday benefit those who understand how to think about them and to value them” (WWR 2, 478). Of course, the accusation that one's philosophical rival is careerist is not an invention of WWR. What is new is a metaphysics to filter this accusation through – a philosophy that focuses on the subjugation of intellect to the will.

This brings the text into immediate proximity with those texts of Nietzsche that aim to “diagnose” the sort of will that drives different philosophers. Socrates (in *Twilight of the Idols*) is motivated by *ressentiment* against the well-constituted Athenian aristocrats. Kant (in *Beyond Good and Evil*) is motivated by pride at having written something so intensely

complicated as the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This latter analysis is worth a closer look. *Beyond Good and Evil* rapidly discards (as nonsensical) the suggestion that the *Critique of Pure Reason* might be true, arguing instead that it is entirely vacuous and begs every important philosophical question (“answers like this belong in comedy”²⁰). Rather, the text is motivated by, and attractive on account of, the pride that Kant took in its production.

First and foremost, Kant was proud of his table of categories, and he said with this table in his hands: “this is the hardest thing that ever could have been undertaken on behalf of metaphysics.” – But let us be clear about this “could have been”! He was proud of having *discovered* a new faculty in humans, the faculty of synthetic judgments *a priori*. Of course he was deceiving himself here, but the development and rapid blossoming of German philosophy depended on this pride.²¹

Beyond Good and Evil does not waste time condemning Kant for his self-deception, but instead takes time to admire his charisma and its salutary effects. Socrates, on the other hand, is judged harshly for destroying the healthy Greek body by defending the slave morality of dialogical reasoning (“I recognized Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decay, as agents of Greek disintegration”²²). Despite this difference, the relevant similarity is that both philosophies (that of Kant and that of Socrates) are symptomatic of different configurations of will – they can only be assessed in reference to the will that motivates them. Precisely the same thing is true for the critique of Hegel in WWR, which is similar, in particular, to the critique of Kant in *Beyond Good and Evil*. As with the critique of Kant, WWR condemns its target’s philosophy as vacuous, a lot of words with no philosophical substance. As such, the argument goes, the motivation of the author to philosophize needs to be sought elsewhere – in the case of Hegel, in a narrowly self-interested desire for intellectual prestige. Thought is referred to its material conditions, which are the object of critique (in the philosophical sense). We saw this earlier, when Volume 2 of WWR admitted its materially grounded epistemological blind spot in the case of sexual desire. And now, in the case of Hegel, we can see again that the philosophical subject is not a universal subject, but is conditioned by the particularities of its individual will, perhaps even will to power.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

²¹ Ibid., 12. ²² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ*, 162.

5 Plurality

This discussion has suggested some ideas to explore, in looking to WWR for a foothold for a feminist reader. The text does not have the rich array of resources that Nietzsche's texts offer, with their open attack on the universal subject and the autonomy of thought, and their loud valorization of the body and fertility. But we can discern, in WWR, not only a challenge to the traditional (masculine) conception of subjectivity (an individualistic notion where the intellect wields agency by virtue of a mastery relationship over nature and the body) but a conception of thought as sometimes determined and restricted by its material conditions; indeed, the text engages in a recognizably genealogical critique that pins philosophy to its material origin in the will. So following the somewhat unexpected procedure we have established, of taking Nietzsche's texts as our model of an accomplished feminism and looking to WWR for the seeds of this nascent feminism, we can ask: How far on this path does WWR go?

I want to start by pushing a bit more on the notion of pluralism, the dissolution of the universal notion of subjectivity. For there to be such things as female subjects of philosophy, there need to be multiple subjects – that is, we need to challenge the notion of a universal normative subjectivity. Nietzsche's texts present just such a challenge, and defend pluralism at the level of will. Although WWR does not pluralize will in the same way as we see in *Will to Power* (as well as in many of Nietzsche's published works), which present “will to power” as multiple and dispersed, there is certainly scope for pushing WWR in that direction. For one thing, the will in WWR demonstrates plurality in the form of the Ideas, which the text describes as struggling among themselves for power.²³ Despite the metaphysical inconsistencies that the doctrine of Ideas introduces into WWR,²⁴ the text makes foundational and extensive use of the notion, not least because it accounts for conflict on a metaphysical level. WWR is quite ambiguous, however, when it comes to thinking about the Ideas in relation to human beings. On the one hand, it equates the Idea with the species and discusses the Idea of humanity (for instance, in the discussions of poetry and historical painting in Book 3). But elsewhere the text clarifies that each

²³ The “one will objectifies itself in all Ideas; and in striving for the highest possible objectivation, it now abandons the lower levels of its appearance after a conflict between them, in order to appear on a higher and thus more powerful level. No victory without a struggle” (WWR I, 170).

²⁴ One problematic issue involves precisely the plurality of the Ideas. Although the text makes clear that there are multiple Ideas (there need to be, for conflict), spatiality and temporality, which are jointly responsible for individuation and thus multiplicity, are not evident on this metaphysical level.

individual has their own Idea, which is identified with intelligible character (WWR 1, 183). This would be grounds for a pluralism, but not necessarily of a sort that lends itself immediately to a feminism. In his article on anti-semitism in WWR, Bob Wicks argues that intelligible character is beneath the level of “historical contingency.”²⁵ In other words, these differences don’t account for identity. Wicks means religious and ethnic identity. But what about sexual identity? Is that similarly contingent? If so, the will is not sexed.

On the other hand, the plurality of Ideas in WWR is needed to account not just for conflict in the will but for its perpetuation – the will to life needs to generate sexual difference to perpetuate itself on the level of animal life. This is a state of affairs that apparently perplexed Kant. Ursula Pia Jauch cites a letter written by Kant in the 1790s, stating, “the fact that not unity but difference is necessary for the reproduction of the human species . . . had ‘always’ struck him as ‘amazing and as a sort of chasm of thought’ for reason.”²⁶ The hostility to embodiment characteristic of Kant’s writings – his inability in general to conceive that thought might have material conditions – prepares us to expect him to be amazed by this fact. Sexual difference can hardly be deduced from pure reason – it is a brute anthropological circumstance that must be invisible from the perspective of a nonmaterialist transcendental philosophy. WWR, by contrast, has resources that none of Kant’s texts apparently had, to allow thought to negotiate this chasm, though only on condition that we see sexual difference as intrinsic to the will. The metaphysical essence of humanity (the Idea of humanity) is not one but multiple, and some (half, approximately) of those multiple essences are female. There needs to be sexual difference at the level of will – sexual difference needs to be ontological difference in the WWR. Not just sexual love, but sexual difference, has a metaphysics. And not just a metaphysics, an epistemology as well; in section 2 above, we saw how there is sexually situated knowledge in WWR, specifically in the “Metaphysics of Sexual Love.” This detour through Nietzsche’s texts has enabled us to see not just how such situated knowledge is actual, but how it is possible. That is, Nietzsche’s texts allow us to notice how, in WWR, philosophy is grounded in material conditions (which is to say the will), and those material conditions can include sexual difference.

²⁵ Robert Wicks, “Schopenhauer and Judaism,” in Shapshay, *Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, 347.

²⁶ Ursula Pia Jauch, “Kant or Schopenhauer,” 106.

6 Not Willing

Despite the affinities that I have indicated between WWR and Nietzsche's texts, and the use I have been able to make of their juxtaposition, it remains the case that there are stark and important differences. Nietzsche's texts explicitly reject a normative/universal subject of knowledge, and introduce a successor notion in the image of a joyful (gay), fertile, multitude of wills to power, overflowing with abundant strength in the service of the creation of new values. This image is utterly foreign to the way in which WWR describes our grounding in the will, where we are mostly just struggling, unsuccessfully, to find enough alms to throw to the beggar so her agony is prolonged until tomorrow. If WWR contains the tools to reject a normative/universal subject of reason and to ground thought in will in ways that produce a multitude of knowledges, it is *deeply* unaware of that fact. Ultimately, it is not looking to situate knowledge in the will so much as it is looking to escape the will altogether; and it introduces a vehicle for this escape in the form of a pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject (WWR I, 201).

This is why, when *On the Genealogy of Morals* states the case for rooting knowledge in will, it does so in clear and pointed opposition to WWR.

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject" . . . [which demands that] we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing" . . . to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this – what would that mean but to castrate the intellect?²⁷

"Castration" is a striking image for the text to use in this context. Not only does it immediately identify the body with sexuality, but it appears to imply that the only sexuality that would need removing to make knowledge possible is stereotypically male sexuality. We can also note that as much as the *Genealogy of Morals* might correctly identify the "castrated intellect" as the ideal that is promoted in WWR, it is apparently not the reality for the authorial avatar in the "Metaphysics of Sexual Love." There, "Schopenhauer" does *not* have an "eye turned in no particular direction"

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), section III, §12.

but rather an eye that looks women squarely in the chest, and admits it doesn't know how women look at men. (And it bears mentioning that when push comes to shove, as it were, the author-effect would rather admit to ignorance and partiality, showing itself *not* to be the untarnished mirror of the world, than disavow its masculinity.)

Nevertheless, as manly as this ignorance might be, it remains ignorance, and the text still promotes the ideal that it does not achieve, of unbiased knowledge held by a castrated intellect. And here, on the level of the ideal, the distinction between WWR and Nietzsche's texts becomes most visible. Optimal knowledge, for WWR, comes not from an intellect working within the constraints of the body as a medium, but from a will-less, sex-less subject whose objectivity is gained by purifying subjectivity of the epistemic blinkers of the body. I want, in conclusion, to look at the way the text presents this ideal "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject," to see whether it represents an affirmation of the sort of implicitly masculine, universal/normative, disembodied subject of knowledge of the sort that I have been trying to distance WWR from.

There are at least two places in the text that answer to this ideal, which is to say at least two models of this will-less subject of pure knowledge: the artistic genius and the ascetic saint. The text describes genius as a "pure cognitive subject," possessing "the most perfect objectivity"; it is "the clear eye of the world" and "the bright mirror of the essence of the world" (WWR 1, 209). The saint is also a mirror: "a pure, cognizing being . . . an untarnished mirror of the world" (WWR 1, 417). It is worth noting that the genius and the saint are types distinct from the philosopher, because their knowledge is grounded in an intuitive grasp²⁸ of the object that has not been (in the case of the genius) or cannot be (in the case of the saint) raised to a discursive level of conceptual understanding. This does not mean their knowledges are deficient – rather, they are different. As Shapshay argues, "Schopenhauer takes the knowledge of intuition or feeling to be genuine theoretical knowledge."²⁹

The text refers to the ascetic as an "altered" or "entirely different mode of cognition" (WWR 1, 430). As for the genius:

works of visual art do indeed contain all wisdom but only virtually or implicitly: on the other hand, philosophy tries to render this wisdom actually and explicitly, so that in this sense philosophy is to the visual arts

²⁸ The text speaks of an "inner, immediate, intuitive cognition" (WWR 1, 409).

²⁹ Sandra Shapshay, "Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense: Metaphor and Metonymy in Schopenhauer's Philosophy," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16(2) (2008): 221.

what wine is to grapes. What philosophy promises to provide would be an already realized cash profit, as it were, a solid and lasting possession; while what comes from the achievements and works of art is only something that always has to be created anew. (WWR 2, 424)

Philosophical access to the knowledge of ascetics is even more mediated: “[Ascetic] experience is not open to all, rather it is shared by only a favored few, and is therefore described as the effect of divine grace . . . To understand all of this you must read [the texts of the ascetics] yourself and not make do with second-hand reports” (WWR 2, 629–30). The intuitive knowledge of the ascetic, by contrast, is bound up in ascetic practice – in “deeds and conduct” (WWR 1, 410). Because it has an irreducibly practical component it cannot be reproduced conceptually, although it is consistent with the abstract philosophical knowledge the text (“Schopenhauer”) has itself produced. Even then, the text depreciates the “feeble tongue” with which it describes saintliness (WWR 1, 409).

The figures of the genius and saint demonstrate the presence in WWR of different subject positions from which different types of philosophically relevant knowledge can be generated. The knowledge of the genius (knowledge of the Ideas) is different from the knowledge produced by the “altered” cognition of the saint (practical knowledge of the negation of the will to life). What this means is that, even if we focus on the WWR’s non-Nietzschean strategy of generating knowledge by pitting intellect against the will, a direction that does not seem friendly to the type of subject-pluralism generated by Nietzsche’s texts (which are able to ground multiple knowledges in multiple forms of will), there seems to be at least three (perhaps four³⁰) subject positions in WWR. In introducing alternative subject positions, the text is in league with the sort of challenge to a normative, universal conception of subjectivity that we will only find clearly developed in Nietzsche’s texts.

Another key feature of the traditional conception of subjectivity is its implicit masculinity, and I will now look to see if it is possible to distance WWR from this feature as well. We noted the *explicit* masculinity of the subject of philosophy in WWR in section 2 of this essay, and the text extends this masculine privilege to the figure of the genius, declaring (unoriginally, and in league with traditional theories of geniality) that

³⁰ Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell argue that WWR presents compassion and renunciation as two incompatible ethical ideals. Thus there might indeed be different subject positions even within saintliness. See Sandra Shapshay and Tristan Ferrell, “Compassion or Renunciation? That Is the Question of Schopenhauer’s Ethics,” *Enrahonar. Quaderns de Filosofia* 55 (2015): 51–69.

“females can have significant talent but not genius” (WWR 2, 409). By contrast, it is striking how many women are cited as prominent ascetics – Madame de Guyon, for instance, is one of the key references here. This has led John Atwell to write that: “Schopenhauer believes women to equal, or even to excel, men in two of the highest forms of human existence, namely, asceticism (or saintliness) and morality – both of which require a sort of knowledge exceeding that of cold, cool, deliberative rationality.”³¹ It would certainly be convenient for me to accept Atwell’s claim, which gives me a shortcut to my desired conclusion, that there are female subjects of knowledge in WWR. But this is an unsatisfyingly empirical way to resolve the issue: The fact that a significant percentage of the individuals who (empirically) occupy a given subject position are women, does not in itself feminize the subject position.

It is more interesting, therefore, to think about the *implicit* masculinity of the traditional subject position. This implicit masculinity, according to Rosi Braidotti’s criterion, comes from its implication in a mastery relation with its other. There is certainly a model of the triumphant philosopher-subject in operation in the WWR (that of “Schopenhauer,” laying claim to mastery over its text). It is a form of cognition that, the text says, “is in conflict with the will to life and our judgment applauds the victory of cognition over the will” (WWR 2, 40). But there is an alternative model in the text as well, in which knowledge looks more like passive resistance. The subject position of the saint derives its agency not from dominance but instead from standing still – it is the agency of quietism, “i.e. the cessation of all willing, asceticism, i.e. the intentional extirpation of one’s own will” (WWR 2, 48). Certainly there is a paradox in the notion of resisting the will (isn’t resistance just more will?) but this reinforces the point I am making, by signaling a problem with the continued vocabulary of mastery and dominance.

Finally, the traditional conception of subjectivity was problematic in being disembodied, with what *On the Genealogy of Morals* described earlier as a view from nowhere. Indeed, the models that WWR presents of pure will-less subjects of knowledge might appear to dismiss the body. The text cites philosophers who “deplor[e] the communion of the soul with the body and wish to be free of it” (WWR 2, 623). But, looked at more carefully, we can see that the insight ascetics have into the will, and geniuses have into the Ideas, is very much conditioned by their

³¹ John Atwell, “Schopenhauer on Women, Men, and Sexual Love,” *Midwest Quarterly* 38(2) (1997): 151.

embodiment. The relation to the body might be one of antagonism or hard-won indifference, but these are still relationships, attitudes to embodiment rather than an achieved transcendence. Shapshay cautions us not to mistake the embodied subject in WWR with the type of subject evident in Kant's texts, who resemble "a disembodied, rational entity, 'a winged cherub without a body'" (WWR I, 99).³² As Shapshay says:

For Kant, there is nothing theoretically that can be said which would constitute knowledge of the noumenal realm in meaningful terms, but neither is there any tremendous urgency that anything be said about it. For Schopenhauer, because we are embodied, because we are active participants in this world, and not just rational reflectors upon it, there is a sense that we must say something about the way the world is, in itself, of which we are a part: "It will be of special interest for us to obtain information about its real significance, that significance, otherwise merely felt, by virtue of which these pictures or images do not march past us strange and meaningless . . . but speak to us directly, are understood, and acquire an interest that engrosses our whole nature" (WWR I, 95).³³

In other words, WWR contains the resources to address the problem of epistemic motivation. If resistance to the will is what makes knowledge possible for the genius and the saint, embodiment is what makes this knowledge matter. In sum, the accusation in the *Genealogy of Morals* that WWR promotes a disembodied subjectivity is inaccurate. WWR contains a conception of subjectivity that is neither masculine, universal, normative, dominating, nor disembodied.

7 Final Thoughts

What can we conclude from all this? I started this essay by pointing to a problem that many feminist scholars have noted: that most historical texts in philosophy privilege an implicitly masculine subject position. That is, most canonical philosophical texts illegitimately universalize a particular view of subjectivity – they take the position of their author, of a socially elite cis masculinity, and normalize it, treating it as emblematic of humanity. This canonical subject position is generally developed by centering rationality and othering nature, emotion, the body, etc. It privileges mastery, autonomy, and ownership and devalues interconnectedness and situated knowledge – it treats its own mode of knowledge as unsituated – a view from nowhere. And it functions politically (ideologically) to justify the way in which power is unequally distributed between men and women.

³² Sandra Shapshay, "Poetic Intuition and the Bounds of Sense," 221. ³³ Ibid.

As I have said, there is nothing intrinsically masculine about reason or independence, and nothing intrinsically feminine about relationships or nature. To found a feminism on the equation of women and nature is to accept and help consolidate the terms of the old system of oppression. And the problem with the old conception of subjectivity is not only that it devalued women, but that it was wrong. It took a parochial conception of what it meant to be a person, and illegitimately universalized it. There is nothing specifically feminist about contesting the traditional notion of subjectivity in favor of an acknowledgment of embodiment and a pluralism of subject positions. It has fallen to feminism to do so only because of the ideological function the traditional view serves. In meeting this challenge, however, feminism works to liberate not only women but people in general, who are constrained by the normalizing presuppositions of this normative subjectivity. And once we have started to unravel the old conception, we can break down some of the old barriers and realize that there are many subject positions that we can occupy as knowers, and that the body – even the sexed body, whether male, female, or nonbinary – is not extrinsic to thought.

Again: This conclusion works not just in the service of liberation, but in the service of truth; there are sufficient, non-political, “purely” philosophical motivations for this view. And so feminists have found unlikely and inadvertent allies who have aligned with this critical project. The argument of this essay – all I have been trying to show – is that WWR is among the texts that we have to thank for this service to our cause.

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